THE Atlantic

MAY 2005

AMERICA IN FOREIGN EYES

A FRENCHMAN HITS THE ROAD AND TAKES OUR MEASURE
BY BERNARD-HENRI LEVY

ON BECOMING AMERICAN
BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

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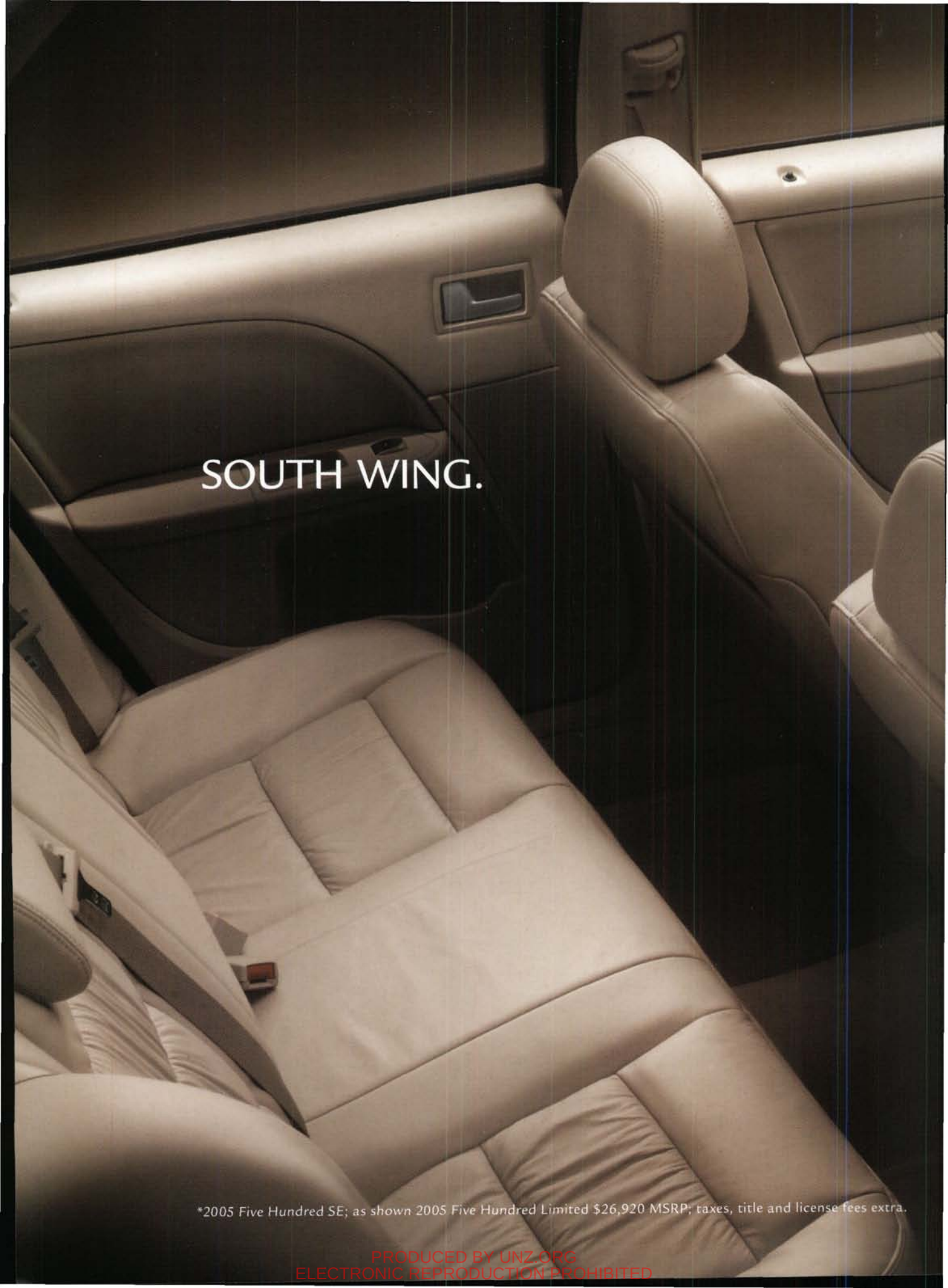

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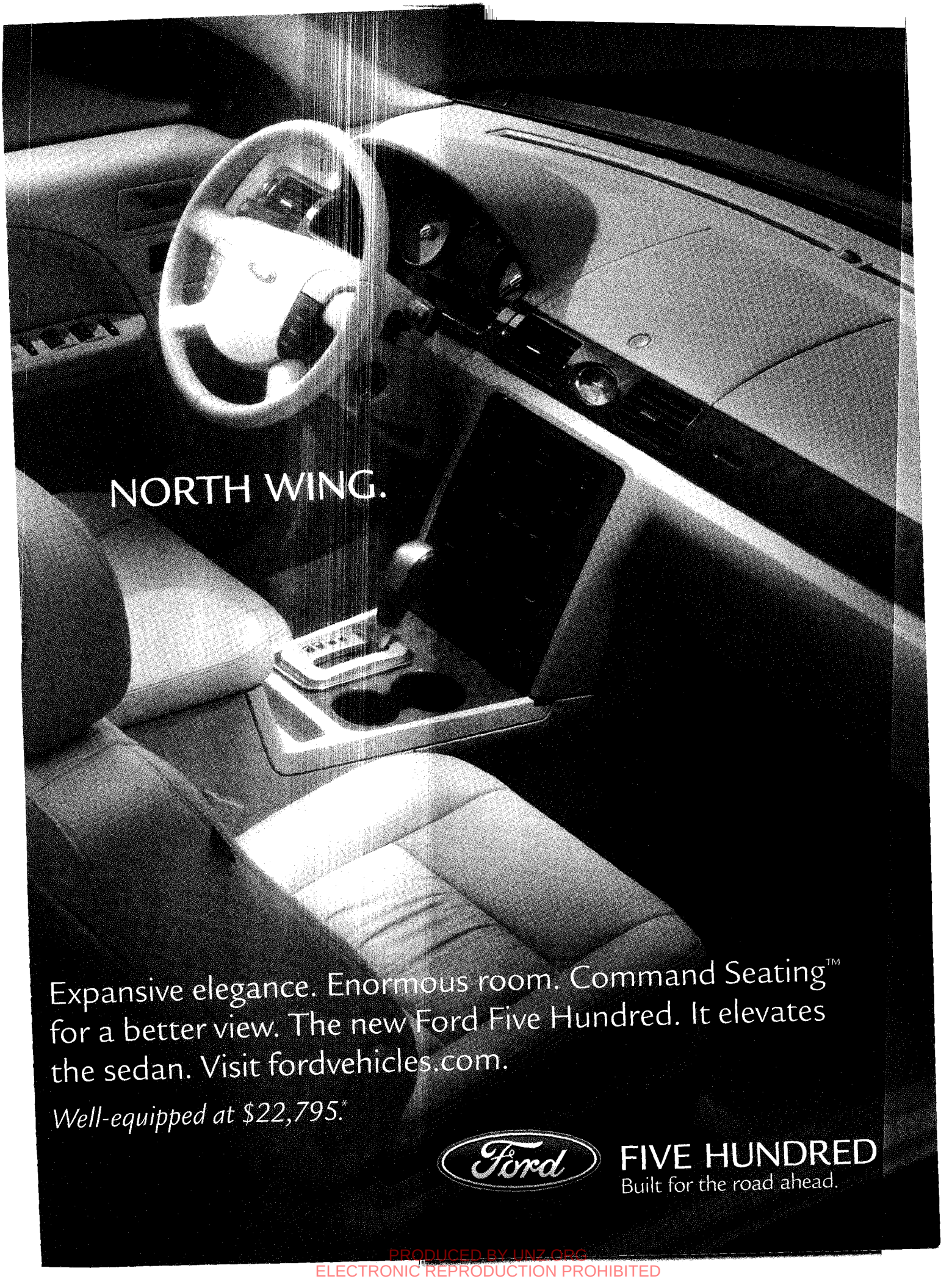

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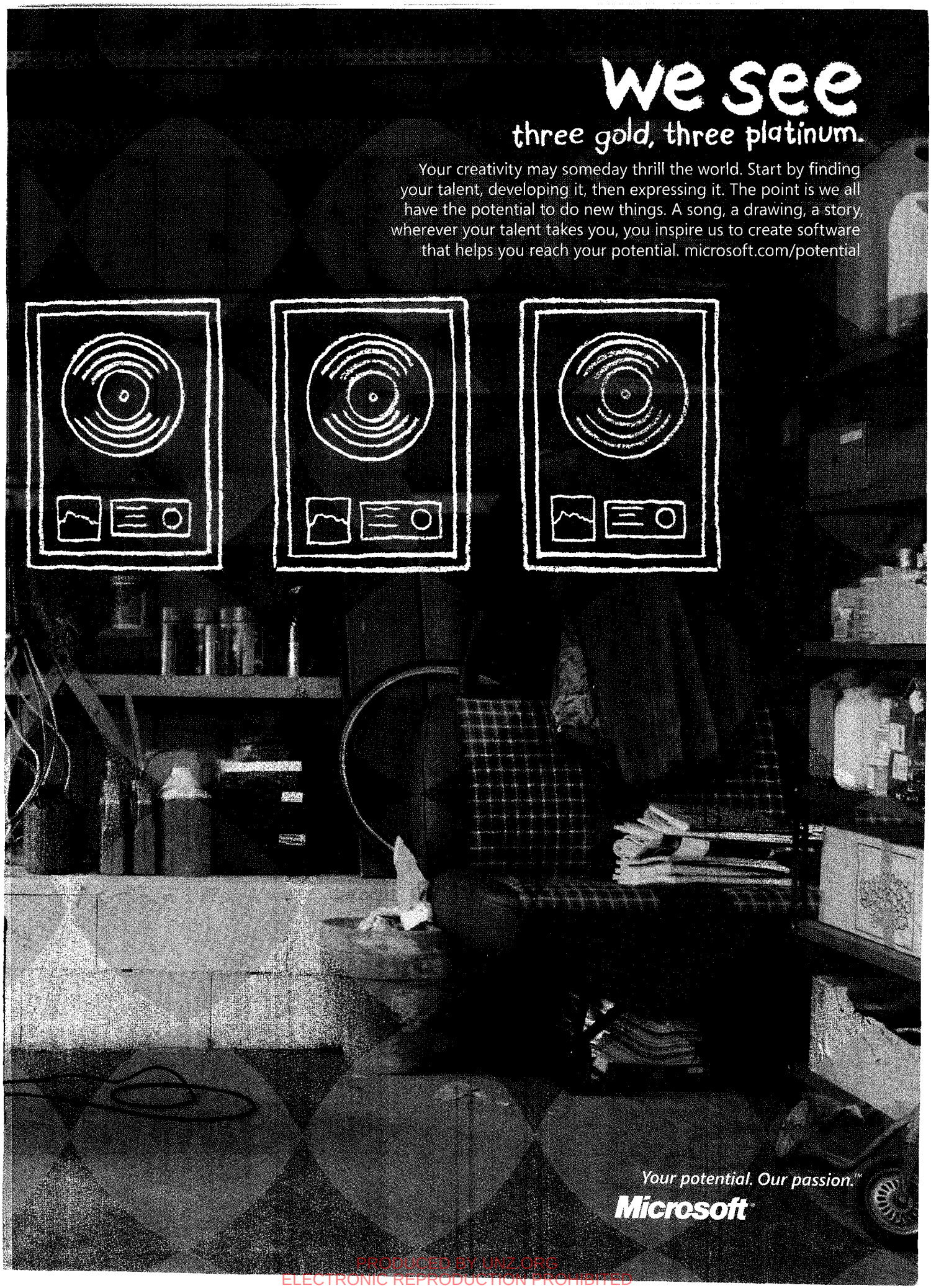

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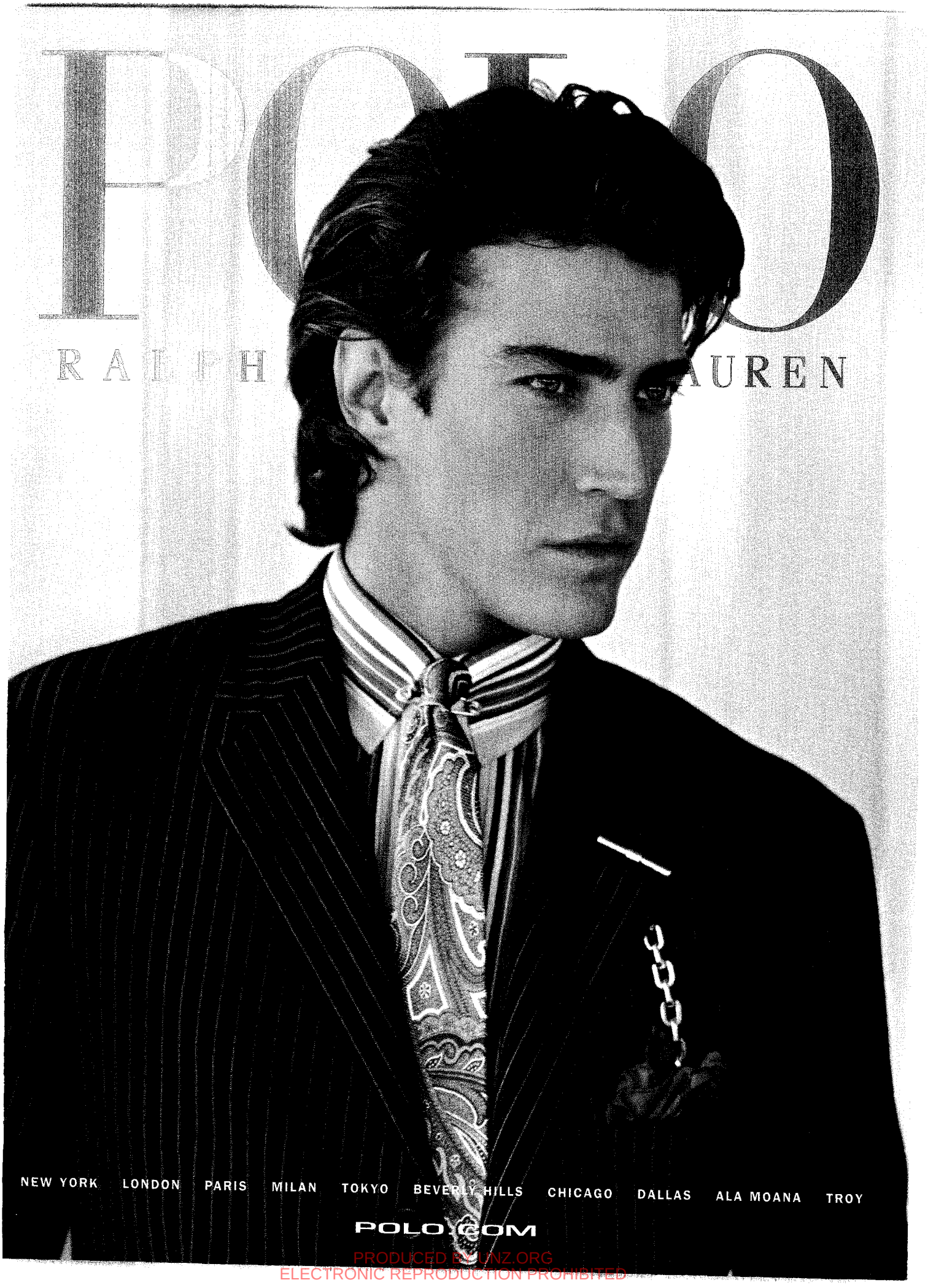

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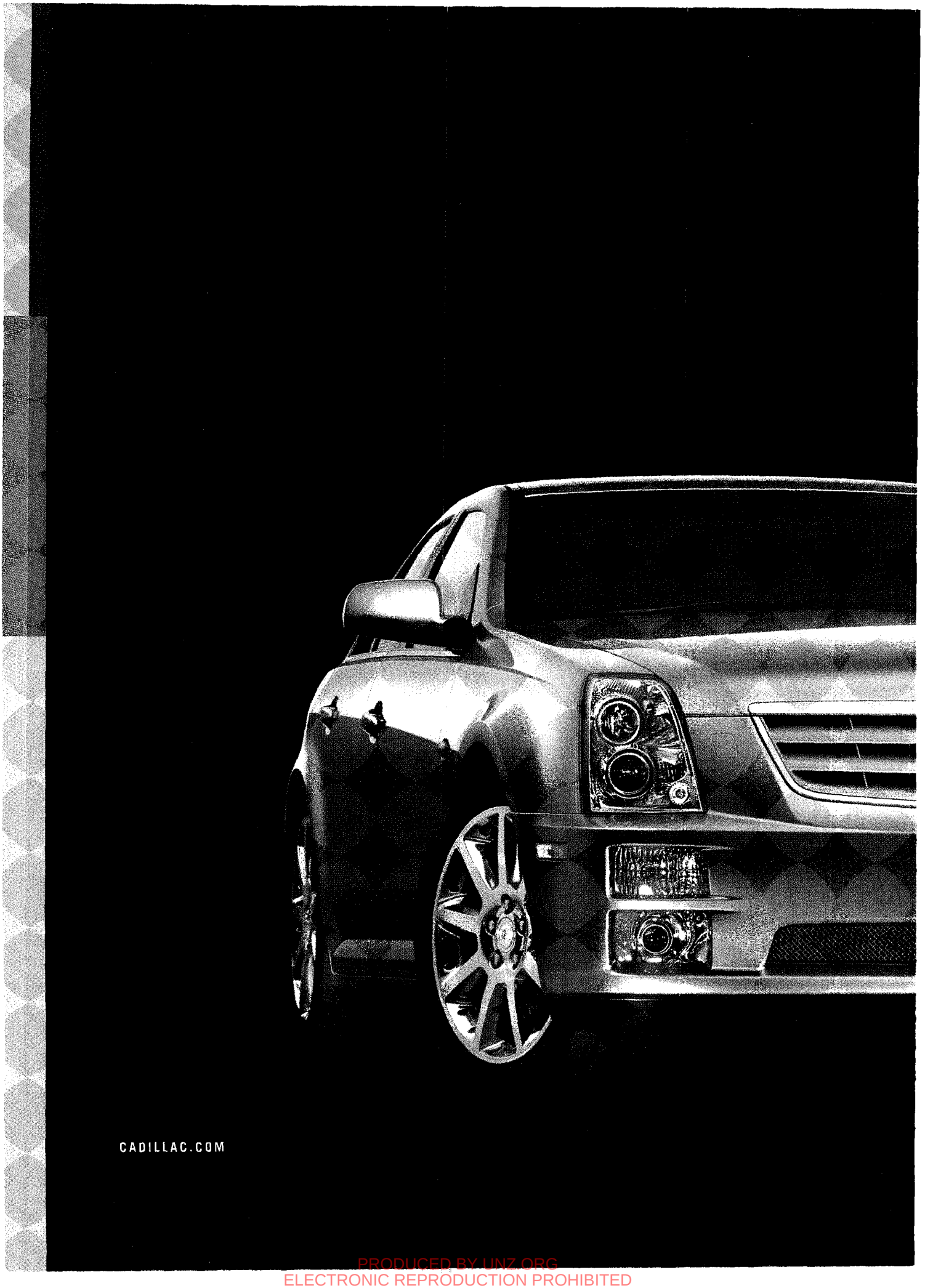

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FOR DIFFERENT DRUMMERS, AND THEIR HEDGE FUND MANAGERS *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed, "It has the biggest potential to shake up the market."[1] Why? An available 15-speaker stereo, 320-hp Northstar V8 and available performance-tuned AWD. **Cadillac STS V6 starting at $41,220.***

STS

BREAK THROUGH

***MSRP. STS V8 as shown $62,735 MSRP.** Tax, title, license, dealer fees, gas guzzler tax and other optional equipment extra.
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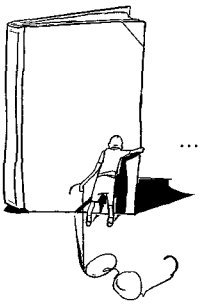
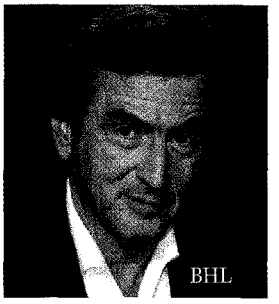


77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

In this issue appears the first of several articles by the French writer and philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, based on his recent extensive travels in the United States. In the years since 9/11 Americans have come to understand that the United States and its people are often seen by the outside world in ways we did not expect—and in ways sharply different from our perceptions of ourselves, to put it mildly. This is something Americans need and want to understand. We invited Lévy to come to America and undertake a journey around the country, like a latter-day Alexis de Tocqueville, and report on what he found. Why Lévy? He has broad experience writing about many parts of the world, in keenly observant and idea-inflected prose. Though he has criticized specific U.S. policies over the years, he is fundamentally sympathetic to the American idea, and in recent years has stood robustly against the visceral anti-Americanism of many of his compatriots. (He calls himself "an anti-anti-American.") In France, Bernard-Henri Lévy is a kind of public intellectual who has no real counterpart in the United States; he is recognized by everyone and referred to as BHL. American readers know him best as the author of *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* Lévy first came to American attention a quarter of a century ago, through his book *Barbarism With a Human Face*, which courageously took to task his soul mates on the left for their blindness to—or their unwillingness to confront and condemn—the totalitarianism of communist regimes.



BHL

CMC

Since the spring of last year Lévy has crossed the country twice, always traveling by land, following his curiosity to big cities and small towns and into the middle of nowhere. The result is neither a grand Cartesian synthesis nor a Gallic finger-wagging but the perceptive travelogue of a visitor who finds himself variously attracted and repelled, astonished and mystified, and both very much at home and very much a foreigner.

.....

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR readers have written to point out the obvious: that short fiction, an *Atlantic* mainstay, has sometimes been missing from these pages. That intermittent phenomenon reflects a larger challenge—one that we have long needed to confront. The challenge is "real estate"—space in the magazine—at a time when in-depth narrative reporting from around the country and the world has become more important than ever.

The Atlantic has never been exactly the same from generation to generation: its sensibility and outlook have been remarkably consistent, but the magazine's components have varied according to the needs of the time. During much of the late nineteenth century *The Atlantic* was primarily a "literary" magazine, dominated by fiction and criticism. At other times we have been an important home for writing by social reformers, academic specialists, and public figures and public intellectuals. Such voices will always have a place.

Long-form narrative reporting made its appearance in these pages during the Civil War and has been part of the editorial mixture ever since. Today there is an urgent need, and a corresponding hunger, for this kind of writing. Everyone knows that the surface features of the news are being reported faster all the time, in smaller and smaller bits. But explaining the deeper features of the world requires a different and more expansive kind of reporting—one that has increasingly become *The Atlantic*'s signature. That reporting consumes a lot of space.

This brings us back to fiction. We will no longer offer a short story in every issue of the magazine—but we remain committed to the form. This August we will therefore produce an extra annual *Atlantic* fiction issue—available in print form on newsstands, and on our Web site for subscribers—which will include original work by the best-known writers in the country and the most promising newcomers.

The impresario of the fiction issue will be C. Michael Curtis, who has been an editor at *The Atlantic* for four decades. For most of that time he has had primary responsibility for selecting short stories. In the course of his distinguished career Curtis has helped hundreds of fiction writers to find their voices. He is a frequent visitor to writing programs around the country, and keeps up a vast correspondence with young writers seeking counsel. All of this, and a role at the magazine, will continue. Readers who enjoy fiction will want to be aware of Curtis's publishing activities on the side: he has edited a number of highly regarded story collections, including *Faith: Stories* and *God: Stories*, both published by Houghton Mifflin. –*THE EDITORS*

TOP: ERIC FOUGERE/CORBIS; BOTTOM: MARTIN CORNEL

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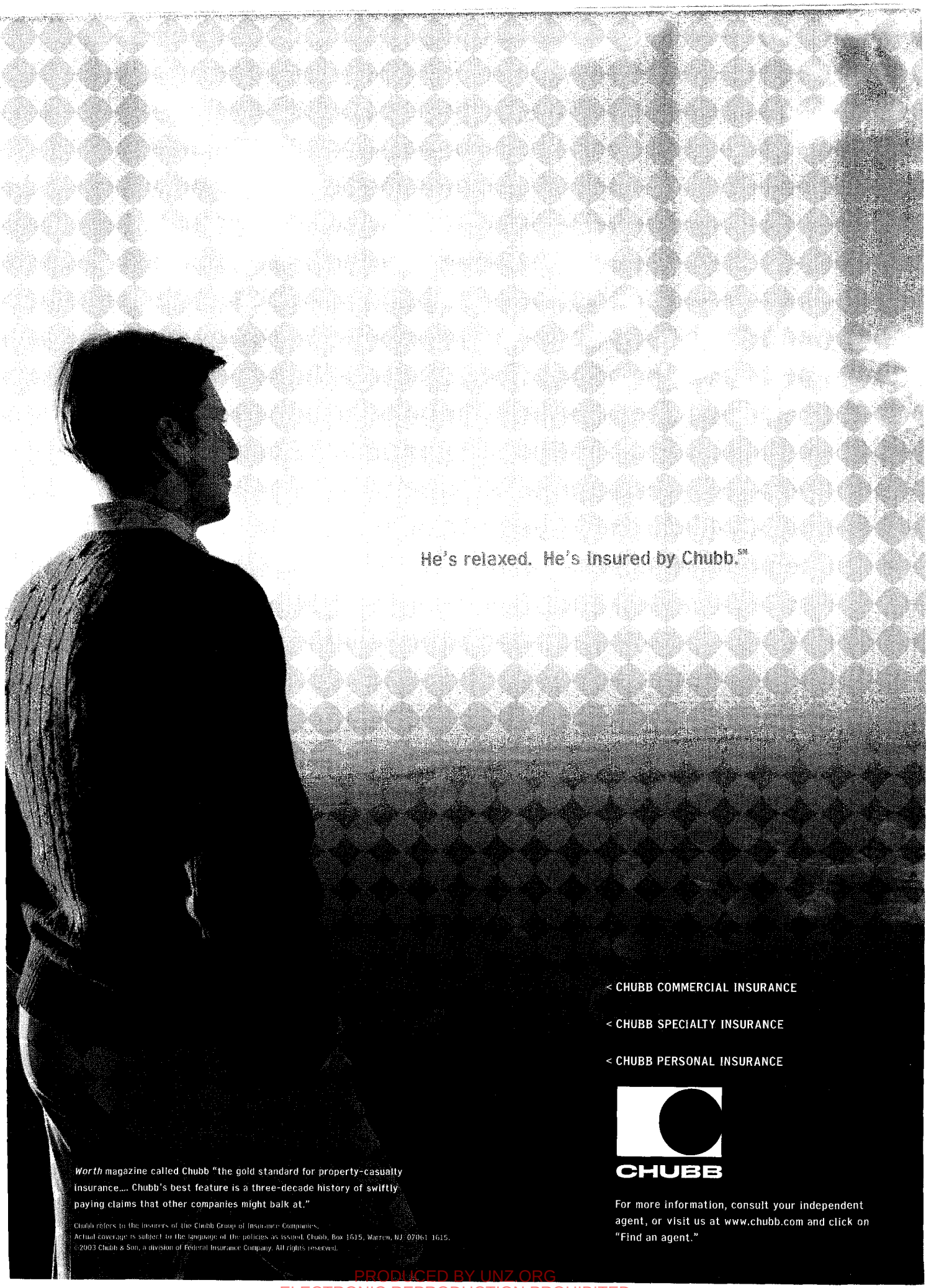

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This month on the Web . . .

INTERVIEW
Bernard-Henri Lévy
The author of "In the Footsteps of Tocqueville" on America as seen through foreign eyes.

INTERVIEW
Kazuo Ishiguro
The Booker Prize–winning author discusses his new novel, *Never Let Me Go,* which is reviewed in this issue.

FLASHBACKS
John Brown
A collection of writings—some by John Brown's friends and collaborators—sheds light on the abolitionist who famously led an 1859 raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

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new reality
09

the glass is half full, but that's debatable.*

the cost/benefit of sarbanes-oxley 404.

Sarbanes-Oxley Section 404 requires public companies to attest to the effectiveness of their internal controls over financial reporting.

As we await the first 404 reports, the debate has heated up a notch about whether these reports will have any impact on the level of confidence investors have in the financial reporting from public companies.

Possibly the greatest concern about Section 404 coming from those deep in the compliance process is the cost of the work in both time and money. Many companies are looking at this cost and are candidly questioning whether there's a corresponding benefit.

And that really cuts to the core of the 404 debate: will all this be worth the effort? Part of the answer will come when the reports are released and investors respond. Will they see value in this new information? Will these reports help rebuild investor confidence?

We are hopeful that investors will spend the time to understand the relevance and benefits of these reports. We have attempted in past communications to frame how this information may contribute to better decisions. In addition, the Big 4 firms have co-authored two investor guides to 404 that help explain what much of this means. (Both investor guides can be accessed at www.s-oxinternalcontrolinfo.com)

Two things that investors should take great comfort in are the significant attention and effort being given to internal controls by companies and auditors.

Never across corporate America has there been such an intense focus on examining whether the appropriate internal controls over financial reporting are in place and are functioning. 404 is an opportunity for a company to document and test its internal controls over financial reporting *before* problems happen. This is the chance to find weaknesses and correct them. Our experience in the marketplace is that this is happening. Many issues have been identified and have been or will be remediated.

This should be good news to investors *and* corporate management. CEOs and CFOs are now living in a world where they have new responsibilities for financial reporting. One CEO recently framed the situation in purely human terms: "This is the legislation that will let me sleep better at night."

But maybe a good night's sleep should cost less. And this is an issue that certainly can be explored in the coming months. What enhancements can be made to the 404 standard? What efficiencies can be gained?

An immediate and robust post-mortem on this first 404 effort by all those involved in the financial reporting process can answer some of the questions as well as identify best practices. But to see the real impact of 404 – improved investor confidence evidenced by a better capital allocation process – will take more than a few months.

In reality, it is too soon to decide whether the glass is half full or half empty. 404 simply needs time to work. We are confident that as 404 costs come down; as regulators, auditors, and companies refine and improve the process; as investors begin to digest this new perspective and assess its value, the water level will surely rise.

To find out more, visit pwc.com/newrealities

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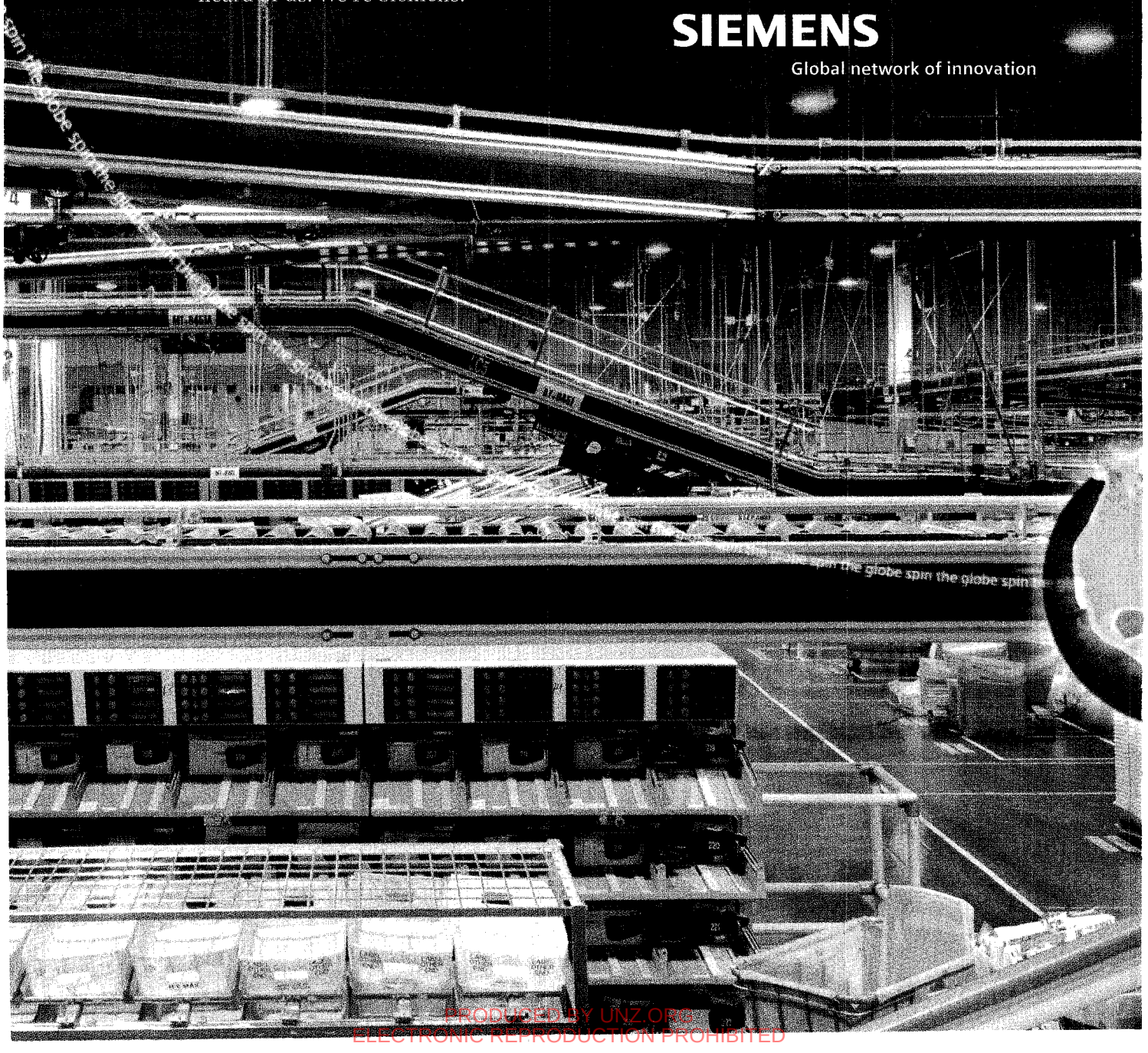
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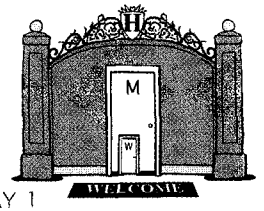
CALENDAR

WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN THE WEEKS AHEAD



MAY 1

Summers Storm

To calm the uproar that followed when he suggested that innate sex differences may account in part for the paucity of women in the sciences, Harvard's president, Lawrence Summers, established two task forces to tackle faculty gender disparities. They are due to report back today, with recommendations expected to go into effect this fall. Probably on the agenda: a new senior administrator responsible for gender representation; faculty searches focusing on women; and new measures to help faculty members balance work and family commitments.

MAY 2

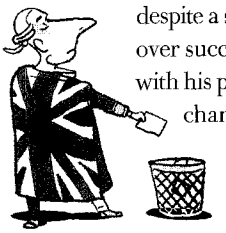
Research Goes Public

The National Institutes of Health has asked grant recipients to post their journal articles free of charge, starting today, on an NIH database, PubMed Central. (NIH grant recipients produce about 11 percent of all U.S. medical literature—roughly 60,000 articles each year.) The controversial move is part of an effort to increase public trust and address concerns about transparency at the NIH. It has put researchers in a bind; they are asked (though not required) to comply "as soon as possible, and within 12 months of final publication," which is rarely in their publishers' financial interests.

MAY 5

Britain Goes to the Polls

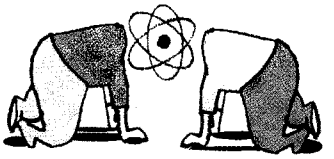
Most anticipate that the Labour Party will continue in power after the elections expected today, as will Tony Blair—



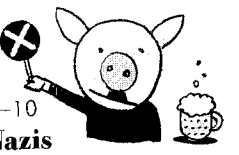
despite a struggle over succession with his powerful chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown. The expectation of a handover to Brown was triggered by the worsening situation in Iraq last spring, and reinforced by Blair's heart troubles and his purchase of an expensive new home (presumably for retirement) near Hyde Park. Last fall, however, Blair announced that he would serve a full five-year term if Labour won, and conservatives were forced to shelve their taunts of "Vote Tony, Get Gordon." Next up on the Blair-survival watch: a contentious yes/no vote on the European Union constitution, expected by the spring of 2006.

MAY 2

Negotiating Nukes



With North Korea emerging as a pugnacious nuclear power, Iran suspected of having a weapons program, and the United States pre-emptively invading a nuclear hopeful even as it develops new nuclear weapons at home, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty faces a crisis of noncompliance. Every five years the treaty signers meet for a review conference; the latest, which kicks off today, promises to be fractious. The man charged with enforcing the NPT, Mohammed ElBaradei, has proposed a five-year moratorium on new uranium-enrichment facilities in exchange for a guaranteed supply of nuclear fuel to affected states. The Bush administration envisions a stricter version of this formula.



MAY 8–10

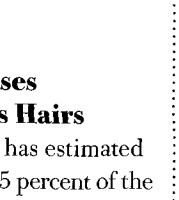
Neo-Nazis Mark Hitler's Fall

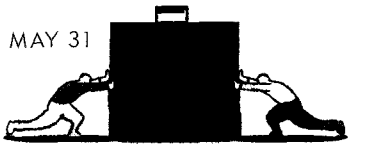
Germany's far-right National Democratic Party rattled mainstream politicians by winning nearly 10 percent of the vote in the economically depressed eastern state of Saxony last year. Its representatives stalked out of their state legislature during a moment of silence for Holocaust remembrance. And in February its supporters conducted a highly publicized march to memorialize the bombing of Dresden, which they compared to the Holocaust. Party members plan to march to the Brandenburg Gate—a block from the new national Holocaust Memorial, for which opening ceremonies will be held on May 10—to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Nazi surrender. The German government has tried in the past to ban the party, and continues its efforts to ban the march.

MAY 16

Military Bases in the Cross Hairs

The Pentagon has estimated that perhaps 25 percent of the nation's military facilities are unnecessary, so military towns are bracing for recommendations today by the Defense Department to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission—the first round of proposed cuts since 1995. From 1988 to 1995, 20 percent of the country's facilities were closed, saving $16.7 billion through 2001 and reducing future costs by another $7 billion a year. If the Pentagon has its way, this highly fraught process may cut 20 percent of remaining facilities, much to the consternation of members of Congress with bases in their districts.





MAY 31

New Faces in World Finance

James Wolfensohn, the ambitious Australian-born financier in charge of the World Bank, steps down today in the first of three changes of leadership over the next two years at top international financial organizations (the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development will follow). Wolfensohn earned praise for paring the Bank's notoriously bloated bureaucracy and broadening its mandate to include social and environmental agendas. Detractors claim that he spread the organization too thin and ignored its core mission of stimulating growth. The Europeans—who have traditionally chosen the International Monetary Fund's head, while the United States has chosen the World Bank's—have nursed a grudge since America blocked the last IMF pick, and could make selecting a successor difficult. *—MATTHEW QUIRK*

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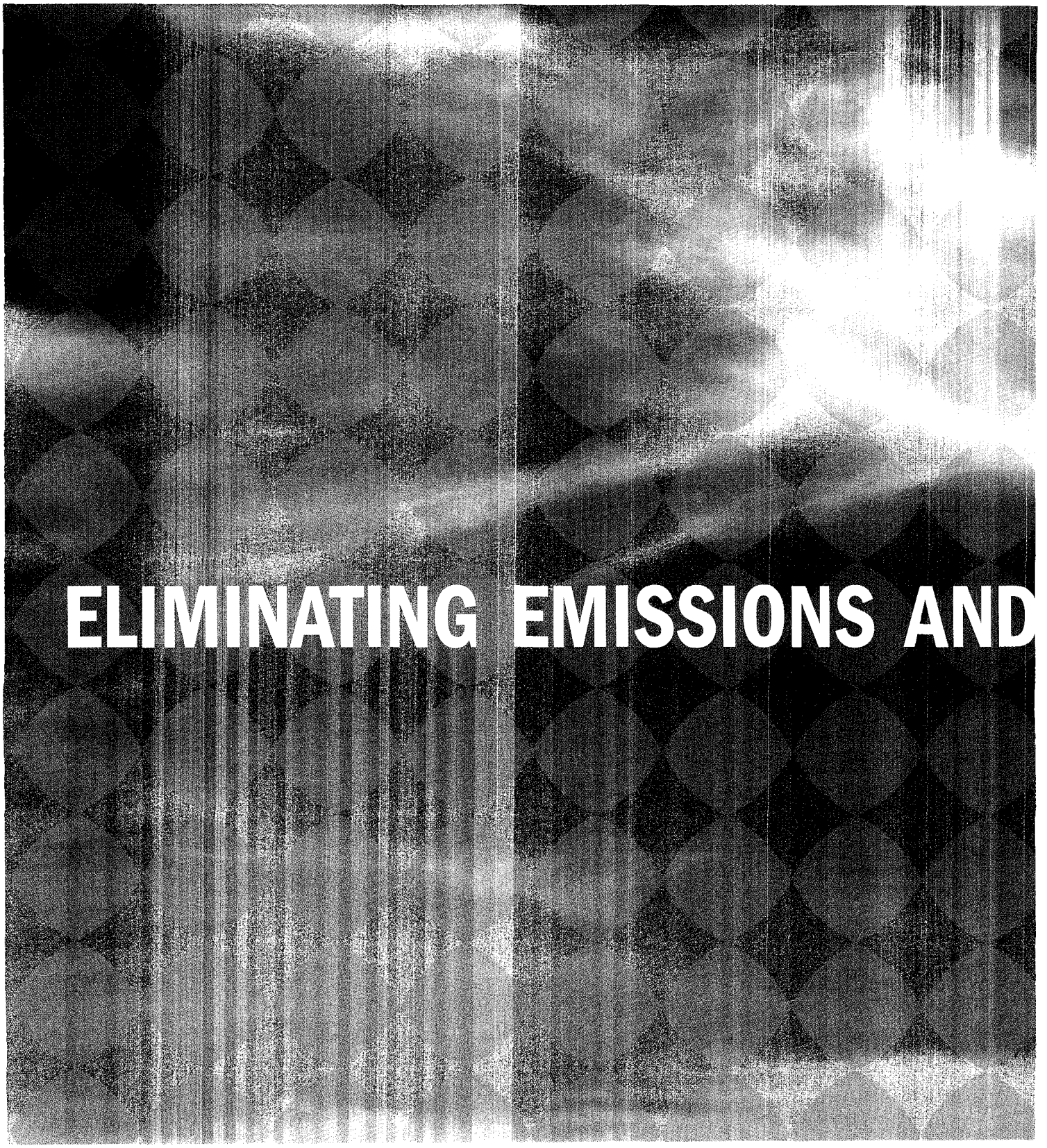

Someone should make hydrogen vehicles and their refueling stations a reality. Only GM could. Only General Motors has teamed up with Shell to introduce the nation's first hydrogen refueling pump at a retail station. It's the endgame of a multi-faceted strategy GM set in motion years ago to make cleaner cars and trucks powered by hydrogen. Right now, a test fleet of hydrogen-powered GM vehicles

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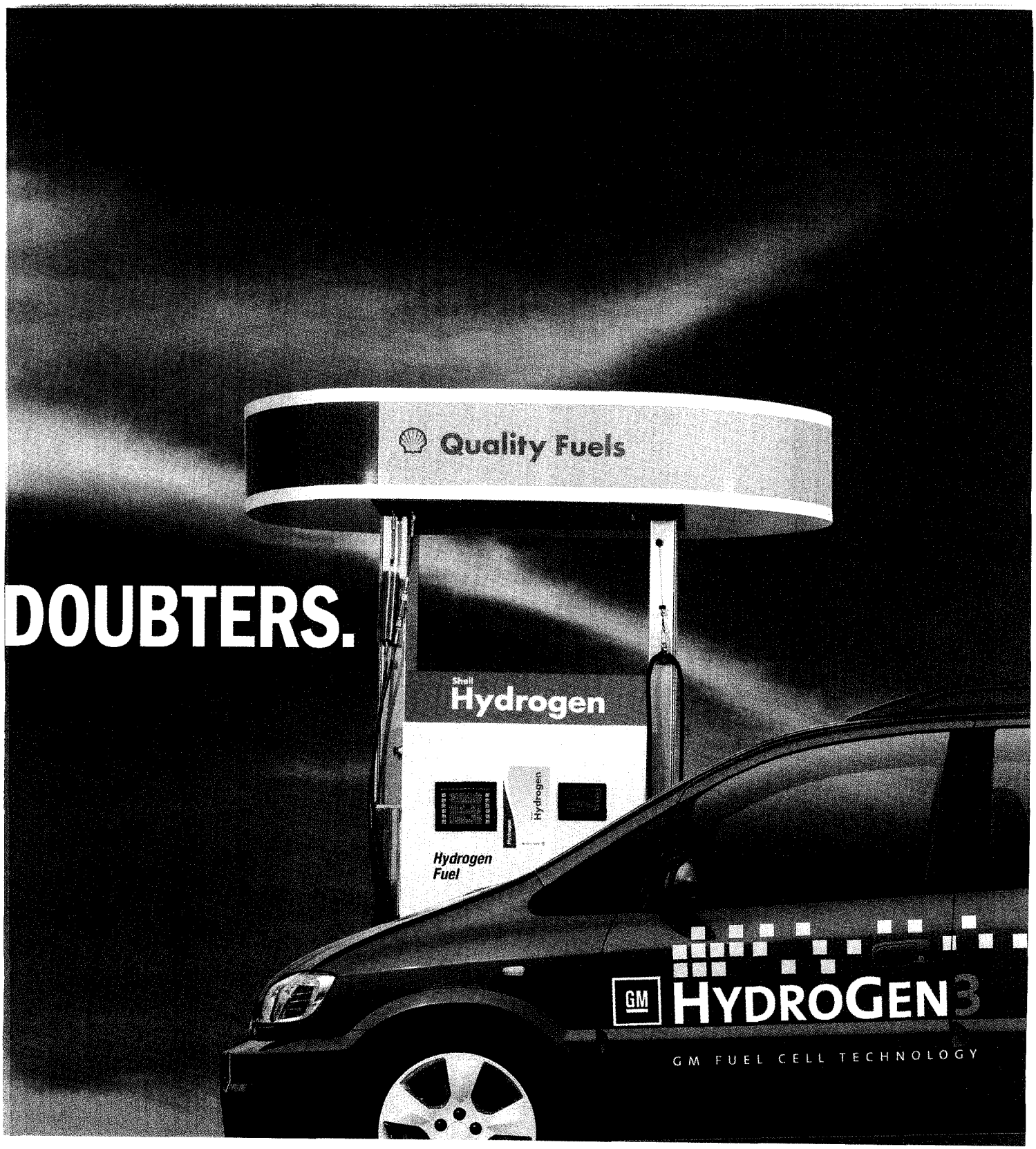

is negotiating traffic in downtown Washington, D.C. GM introduced the first fuel cell-powered concept vehicle nearly forty years ago, and we've continued to push fuel cells forward ever since. With over five hundred GM engineers on three different continents working on hydrogen technologies, it's clear the hydrogen economy isn't a pipe dream anymore.

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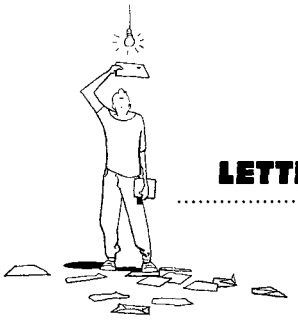

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

State of the Union

In "Shaken and Stirred" (January/February *Atlantic*), Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong report that median annual household income has risen 13 percent in twenty years. During those twenty years, however, didn't the number of workers in each household increase? Aren't those years during which Mom and even the high school students went to work? We learned to call those developments "women's liberation" and "job training for the kids." Am I not correct that the median income of individual full-time workers in the United States has been falling since about 1973? I'd be happy to be told that I'm misreading the statistics.

Edward F. Bergman
City University of New York
New York, N.Y.

As our nation hemorrhages jobs to the lowest bidder, Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong offer a glimmer of hope. But they concede that "the approaching economic shock will be greater in magnitude than anything in recent historical memory." The ripple effect of this "shock" will extend well beyond the economic implications addressed by the authors.

Globalization identifies a new round of winners and losers. Brokers in the global market will most likely be among the winners. Meanwhile, middle-class American workers—with American wages, benefits, and environmental standards—will not compete effectively.

Foreign markets lack the protections that were developed through great effort in this country. The social transformation that created a sound middle class in our nation was demanding and gradual. It nurtured stakeholders in our continuing experiment in self-governance. Globalization, on the other hand, undermines the process. It will devastate middle-class wages, benefits, and protections. Will the ongoing experiment in self-governance weather the loss of a middle class?

John F. Rohe
Petoskey, Mich.

I take issue with Robert Reich's comments on Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong's "Shaken and Stirred" (Letters, March *Atlantic*). Reich asserts that most of America's service jobs won't be offshored because they are "in person-to-person services such as retail, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, surface transportation, education, child care, elder care, and the construction trades." But most of these are low-skill, low-wage starter jobs. The higher-skill, higher-wage jobs can be offshored quite easily, beginning with all management jobs. Supervisors may be needed locally, but managers can be in India or China, thanks to teleconferencing and same-time data delivery. Companies are doing this already, and it will only become more logical and cost-effective—and more prevalent—in the very near future. Even lawyers, by and large, can be located anywhere in the world. (Most never see the inside of a courtroom, and don't need to.)

Jason Taub
Wayne, N.J.

Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong reply:

Alas, Professor Bergman is reading the statistics correctly, and carefully. For a full generation (with the welcome exception of a spurt during the late 1990s), median individual incomes have gone nowhere; certainly not up. Yet the very top incomes (the top five percent, and especially the top one percent) have soared. Household incomes have held up largely because of more (and also relatively better-paid) jobs for women, though a cumulative increase of 13 percent over twenty years is not very impressive. And all this gloom omits the eroding reliability of benefits. Nothing on the horizon looks likely to reverse this long-term squeeze. There is little possibility in the average household of sending another member off to work, although we might expect to see a greater number of kids returning home after finishing their education in order to share expenses and uncertainty.

As for John Rohe's point, we weathered the Gilded Age, after all. And the Gilded Age spawned progressivism. We are hopeful.

I agree with Jonathan Rauch ("Bipolar Disorder," January/February *Atlantic*) that American political life is far more divisive than American cultural life in general. Although he offers a worthy explanation for the ascendancy of extremism within the major political parties, I find a very curious conundrum here. If middle-of-the-road citizens command the demographic landscape, why aren't moderate politicians getting more votes?

I think the answer has to do with the difference between how cultural goods and political goods are delivered in the United States, and with the silence of the silent majority Rauch describes.

In our market economy, where there are niches for ever thinner slices of the populace, the prevailing sentiment is that you can have whatever you want, whenever you want it. Our consumer institutions have learned that in order to survive they must cater to our every individual wish. We, in turn, have come to expect nothing less than complete satisfaction. This is widely accepted as both good and normal.

In politics such a transaction simply isn't possible.

The core idea of American life is essentially one of individual empowerment. Call it life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; this is the great cultural consensus that we live by. However, in practice the idea has often

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metamorphosed into something else: American culture is about winning. In business and sports (as if there is a difference anymore) it's about being the biggest and the best. In spirituality it's about personal salvation. In the arts it's not about making a living but about making a killing. Through victory, salvation, or recognition comes the validation (either personal or public) that we all crave.

Similarly, the core idea of American political life is individual enfranchisement: government is accessible and accountable to every single one of us. This, too, has transformed into a substantially different belief: that government is there to serve each of us personally. But governing is not about victory or defeat. It is about process and action—achieving the greatest good for the many while protecting the few. Yet the only gateway to governing is a political process that requires winning. Therefore the politician needs to reach out to each voter in a personal way.

These days, roughly speaking, 40 percent of the population will always vote to the right, and 40 percent will always vote to the left. Some 20 percent remain in the middle to decide. In pursuing that 20 percent politicians have discovered that it is not sufficient to propose good works that will have the broadest appeal. Because our cultural consensus is based on individuality, citizens are no longer so easily motivated by popular sentiment. So rather than moving the centrist voter across the line to one side or the other, politicians are forced to move the center line past the voter. They need to create partisanship for its own sake.

There are two ways to be a partisan politician. One is to hold extreme views of your own. By this means you draw your own partisans to the polls. Most politicians prefer to exercise this option through the use of (relatively) subtle clues. The other, more important method is to accuse your opponent of holding extreme views. The intent in this case is to drive moderates away from your opponent. This was a major strategy of both Kerry and Bush.

In other words, in a political world shaped by passionate extremism at both ends and complacent moderation in the middle, a politician's most effective tactic is simply to scare people into voting for him. As we all know, fear is a powerful motivator.

Minority players in any political establishment must be made to feel that their interests are sufficiently respected, or else they will not consent to participate in that establishment. It may seem quaint, but the simple truth is that political life in a democracy is all about compromise and cooperation. Forfeit this, and no amount of cultural peace may save us.

David Welle
Oakland, Calif.

I don't believe that Jonathan Rauch's article shed any light on the imaginary red-blue divide or its root cause.

I was born in the United States but spent twenty-two years of my adult life abroad. I cherish the right as a U.S. citizen to choose freely in most every decision of my life, having viewed firsthand the people of many nations who have no expectations of such self-determination. I am disappointed that most Americans find it acceptable to distill life into simple and, usually, diametrically opposed choices. Americans do not have a monopoly on this mindset, but we are damn good at it.

Red or blue, good or evil, right or wrong, Democrat or Republican, hawk or dove, liberal or conservative, God-fearing or not, pro-life or pro-choice, bull market or bear, isolationist versus interventionist. Drugs are either legal or not; films get a thumbs-up or thumbs-down. The list goes on and on. Even as a "centrist" or a person taking a position "on the fence," it is one's fate to be located halfway along a one-dimensional spectrum with left and right, or some other pair of opposites, at its extremes.

And don't even think about changing your opinion on something, because the gaps are just too wide and the required shift too extreme. Indeed, it seems that the only area in which we Americans vigorously execute our right to choose is in the consumer marketplace.

Is it any wonder that we have difficulty explaining and understanding the complexities of multilingual, multiethnic, and multinational conflicts such as those in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East? Should it surprise us that older cultures, with long such histories, at times view us collectively as morons?

Richard Shor
Kirkland, Wash.

Jonathan Rauch finds a political divide and a cultural unity in America. He cites considerable support from academics, pollsters, and other authors for his thesis. But I am not persuaded that the right questions have been asked, or the critical issue identified, if the big question is "the state of the union." The split I see in America is about ninety-nine to one. That would hardly be worth calling a split, except that the one percent see important truths that are largely invisible to the rest. The most likely place to find the one percent is among groups such as Greens, socialists, ecologists, scientists, academics, artists, humanists, non-theists, and progressive activists.

There is a great intellectual divide in America, and people inclined to think deeply about contemporary issues are increasingly turned off by both major parties. In fact, many see little hope in electoral solutions so long as the two establishment parties maintain an iron grip on the levers of power. Ralph Nader is hardly exaggerating when he calls the two major parties a duopoly or a two-party dictatorship. The "third parties" of politics and culture are effectively shut out, and their ideas and solutions will not reach the masses. Some of these ideas could save humanity from itself. It is not the confused independents in the middle who hold the key to salvation; it is the marginalized few. After all, how many followers did Jesus have? The magnitude of the major parties' tragic effort to silence these voices may become clear only when it is too late.

There are ways out of the gloom, but not through the political process. A parallel system based on barter and the Internet may be the answer.

J. Russell Tyldesley
Catonsville, Md.

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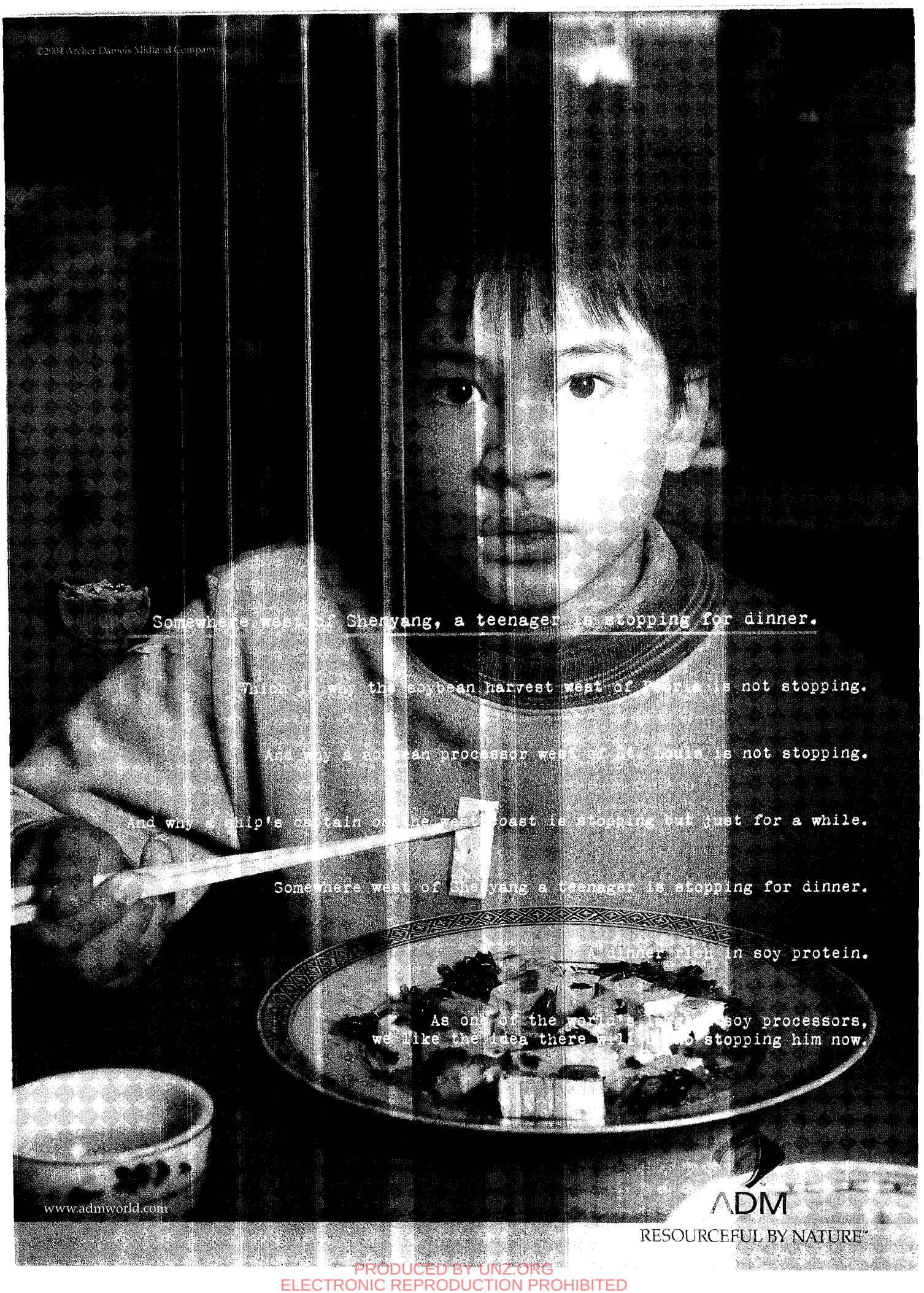

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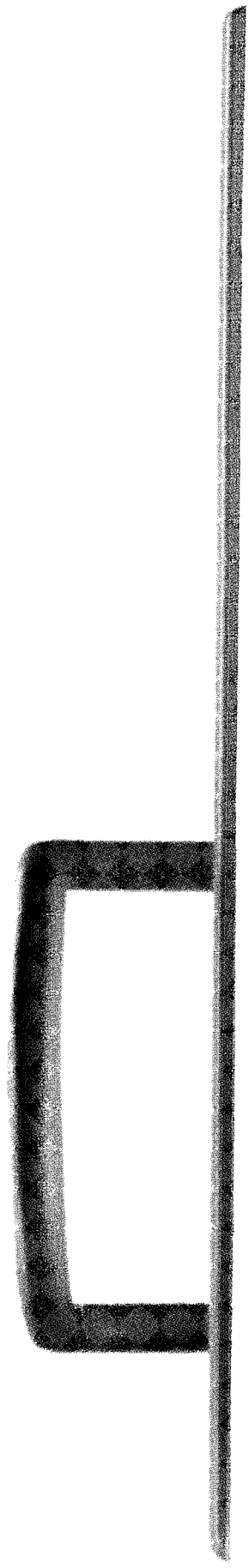

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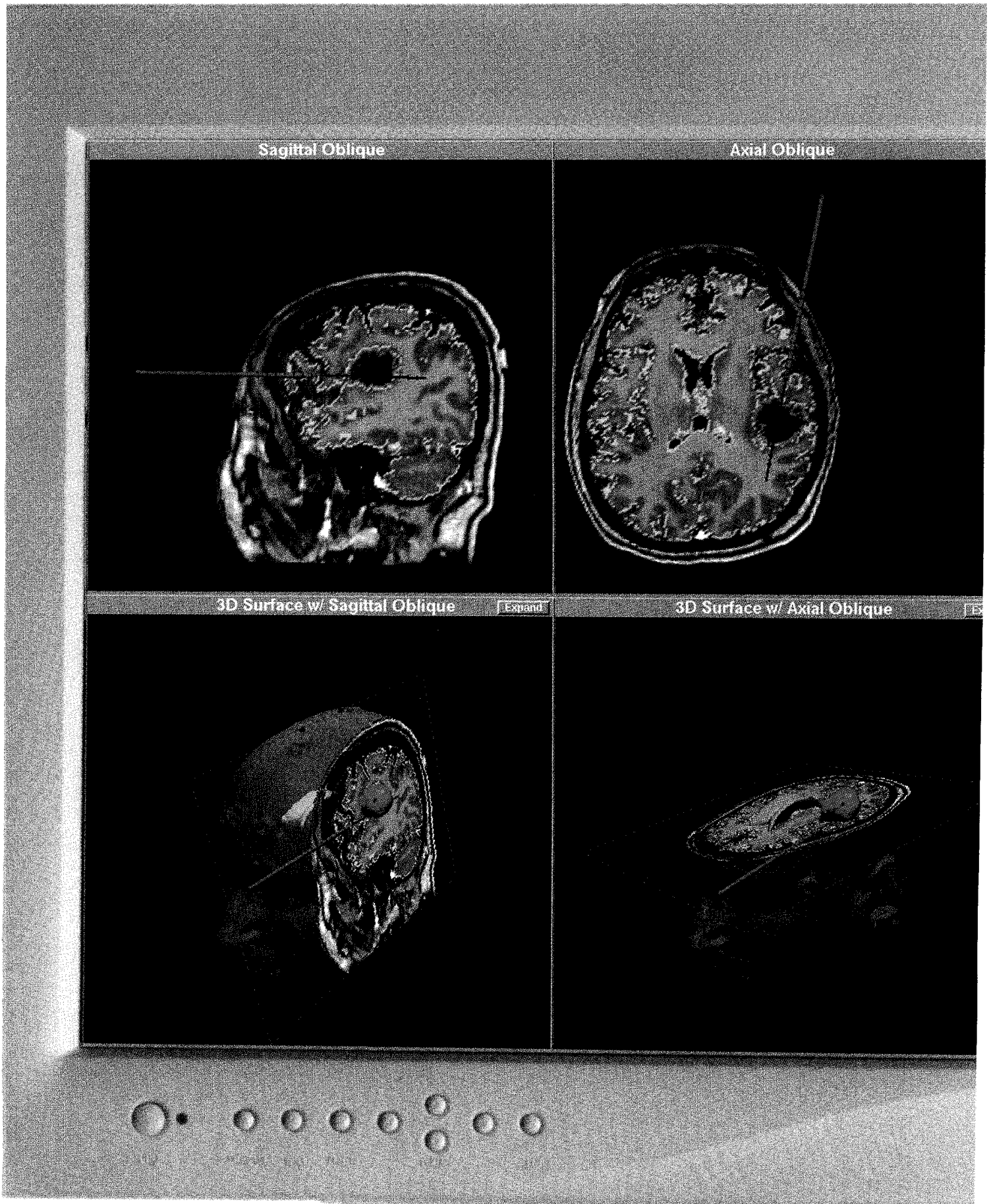

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Hanna Rosin ("Beyond Belief," January/February *Atlantic*) presents a thought-provoking challenge: to define the overlapping relationship between American politics and organized religion.

Evangelicals and other traditionalists tend to focus on Scripture to define morality, while the less traditional would argue that "conscience" should be a determining factor in establishing a moral position. A historical look at God's commandments reveals that these issues are not so cut-and-dried. Two examples immediately come to mind.

First, the Fifth Commandment is generally spoken of as God's prohibition against the taking of innocent life. However, an objective reader of Scripture and history recognizes that this prohibition was limited to those who lived within the ancient Jewish communities. There was no such prohibition against killing outsiders or "nonbelievers." In fact, the Hebrew Scriptures cite numerous examples of killing the innocent in the name of God.

Second, biblical scholars point out that the commandment against adultery, in its original intent, did not prohibit sex with a prostitute; in fact, these ancient cultures considered it men's "right" to engage in such behavior.

Conversely, the Code of Hammurabi (which predates the written Bible) offered far more extensive rules concerning moral behavior than did the Ten Commandments, and went so far as to include women's rights; and all of this without mentioning a commandment from God.

Within the various religious traditions, as Rosin points out, moral opinions differ; but the same people may at different times also view a moral issue differently. The author uses the words "traditionalist," "centrist," and "modernist" to describe religious positions. They might also be described with the terms "legalist" and "relativist." Religious teaching, political affiliation, and the ebbs and flows of life create a bent in one direction or the other, and that bent plays a role in how we define morality. The legalist feels bound by civil law, or doctrines defined in Scripture and interpreted by religious leaders. The relativist relies more on conscience and does not feel bound by religious rules, creeds, or doctrines of faith.

The issue of abortion is an example. The relativist might view abortion as fundamentally immoral but recognize that there are always exceptions. For the legalist such thinking is alien to literal Christian interpretation and religious tradition, and is therefore inherently evil.

To say that God forbids behavior such as capital punishment, stem-cell research, homosexuality, or warfare is, in the eyes of the relativist, not the purview of government. But because the legalist believes that intrinsic evil exists, it is natural for him to support government policies consistent with that belief.

In both organized religion and party politics those in power claim to promote justice, peace, and the advancement of human relationships. Fundamentalist thinkers believe that these are obtainable only by adhering to unbending religious teachings; it is understandable if they are prone to believe that God directly dictates the outcome of human elections.

I thank (the same) God for allowing moral options so that over time justice can be realized.

John J. Valenza
Estero, Fla.

It is sad that American Catholic bishops have become identified with a perverse application of Christian values, and with influencing a large number of Catholics to vote for the re-election of President Bush. A reading of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to Matthew does not lead one to conclude that Jesus would be sympathetic to the policies of Bush, his supporters in Congress, or Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver and like-minded members of the Catholic hierarchy.

Bishop Chaput's position that the killing of the unborn is a "non-negotiable" issue, which caused him to remind his audiences that Kerry supports abortion rights and Bush doesn't, unfortunately does not extend to capital punishment, which the Catholic Church also opposes. During Bush's term as governor of Texas 152 executions took place, with no opposition from either the bishop or Bush himself.

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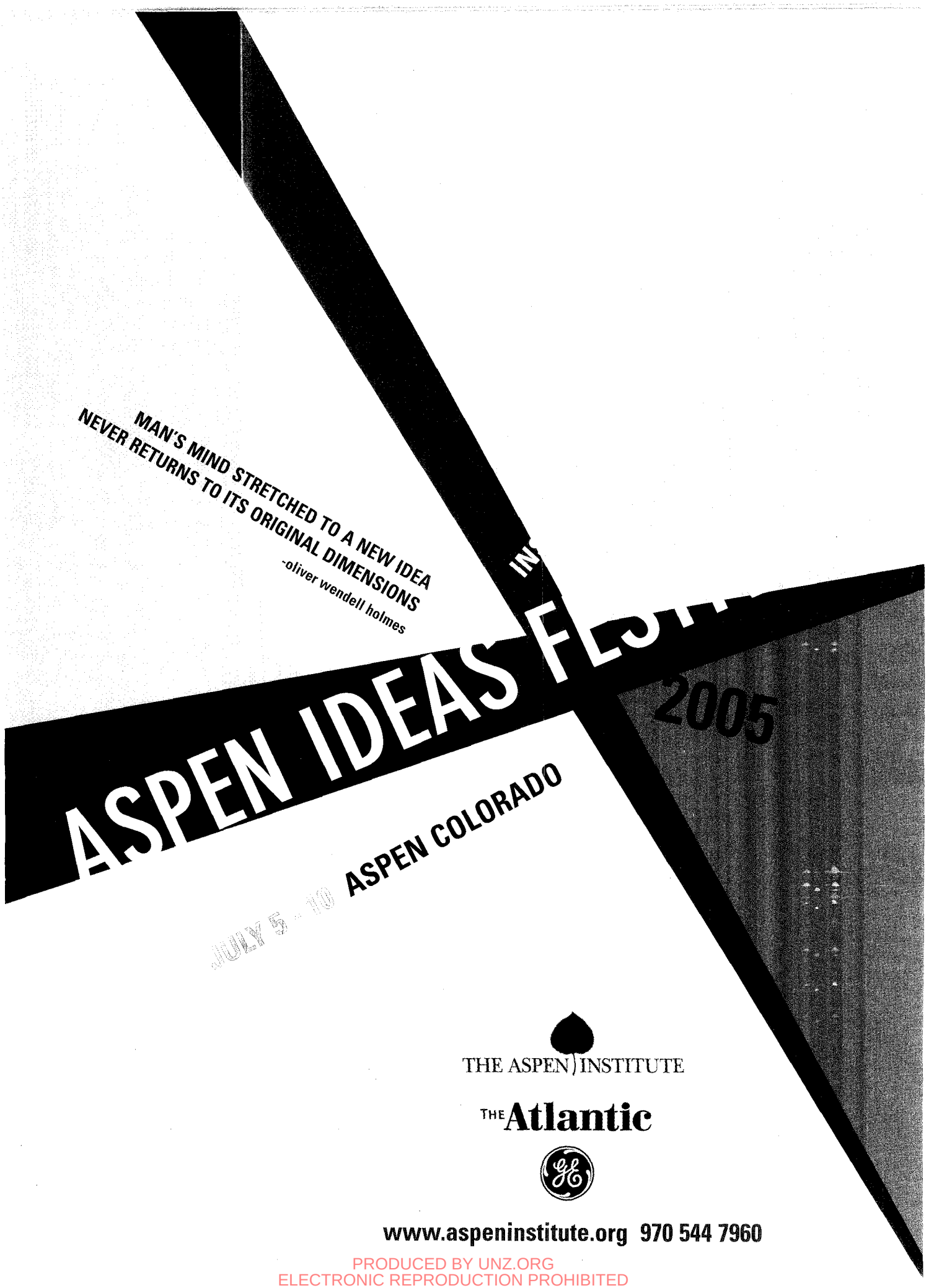

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Nor does the bishop's argument for the sanctity of life extend to the victims of our unwarranted invasion of Iraq (Americans as well as innocent Iraqi men, women, and children), a war declared "unjust" by Pope John Paul II.

John Viteritti
Southold, N.Y.

Hanna Rosin undermines her credibility early in her article when she writes of "some Quaker meetinghouse where all religious viewpoints are equally welcome." This is a shallow and erroneous view of Quaker practice.

Jane Elder Wulff
Battle Ground, Wash.

In your January/February issue you wrong a great American. In "The Massless Media," William Powers comments that James Franklin's *New England Courant* opposed smallpox inoculation, and adds his own comment that "the paper was on the wrong side of that argument."

No, it wasn't. Smallpox inoculation in 1721 was a medical disaster. Enthusiasts took material from an actual human smallpox lesion and inoculated somebody else with it. The result was real smallpox that often resulted in death. There was no difference between smallpox contracted by contact with a smallpox victim and smallpox contracted by inoculation. Certain disfigurement and probable death followed for many individuals who in the normal course of events might not have caught the disease at all.

George Washington followed this lethal protocol, inoculating many Continental troops, with the usual awful results. It wasn't until well into the 1780s that Edward Jenner, a country physician in Gloucestershire, heeded the folk wisdom that dairymaids who caught cowpox from contact with infected cows became immune to smallpox. They often hired out as nurses in smallpox pesthouses, with complete confidence in their immunity.

Jenner realized that cowpox, a mild disease, conferred immunity to smallpox, an often deadly disease; after years of veterinary investigations he carried out the first successful vaccination, thereby saving more lives than anyone else in the history of world medicine.

Brendan Phibbs, M.D.
University of Arizona Medical Center
Tucson, Ariz.

I was quite disappointed that in "Continental Divides" (January/February *Atlantic*) you chose to contribute to the stigma attached to manufactured housing—or mobile homes, as you put it (no "mobile home" has been built since the Housing and Urban Development code went into effect, on June 15, 1976).

The shortage of affordable housing in this country is ongoing and getting worse. Manufactured homes are an alternative form of housing for families who would otherwise not be able to live out the American dream of owning their own home. I encourage you to see for yourself how well they are built; the HUD code is at least as stringent as the building codes for site-built housing.

Rebecca Roberts
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Offense Taken

I was disturbed by Thomas Mallon's use of the word "fag" to refer to a homosexual in his review of the book *Isherwood: A Life Revealed* (January/February *Atlantic*). I should not have to say this, but used in this sense "fag" is a vulgar and extremely offensive word.

Christopher Cunningham
Roswell, N. Mex.

Thomas Mallon replies:
Oh, my gay nerves. A trip to The Random House College Dictionary *might make Christopher Cunningham feel a little better. I did not use the word "fag" to refer to a homosexual. I used it—as does the book I was reviewing—to mean "a younger pupil in a British public school required to perform certain menial tasks for, and submit to the hazing of, an older pupil."*

Rock-a-Bye Baby

Christina Schwarz, in her appraisal of John Updike's *Villages* (January/February *Atlantic*), asserts that the lines she quotes are not "flawless" because

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Updike writes that Mary Lou pushed the carriage back and forth on the way to the store. How can Mary Lou be "on her way" and at the same time be pushing the carriage "back and forth"? There may be flaws, but this is not one of them. Pushing the carriage back and forth is a way of introducing a soothing rocking into the carriage motion. It is accomplished by moving the carriage a greater distance on the forward push than on the backward pull—a sort of two-steps-forward-one-step-back for the carriage as the person pushing continues to stride forward.

Richard S. Bogartz
Amherst, Mass.

Christina Schwarz replies:

One of the pleasures of literary interpretation is that more than one answer may be correct. I tested the motion Richard Bogartz describes when Updike's phrase first troubled me, and found it remarkably awkward. It's certainly not something I'd ever done with my baby or seen others do. Of course, my generation used mostly strollers, but I presume the mechanics of walking and pushing are still pretty much the same. Because of the springs peculiar to carriages, those who use them can simultaneously rock and roll, and manipulators of all infant-carrying vehicles roll them back and forth while waiting to cross a street or stopping to chat, because God forbid the child should have to endure being still. But pushing back and forth on the way somewhere? I agree that it's possible, but try it—it's tougher than it sounds.

Advice & Consent

It would be helpful if David Hajdu would explain what he meant by the remark that Bobby Darin "entered Hunter College on a scholarship" ("Chameleon With a Toupee," January/February *Atlantic*). When Darin went to Hunter College, every enrollee was on "scholarship"; Hunter, along with the other colleges that made up the City University of New York, charged no tuition until the 1970s.

Sidney Gendin
Ann Arbor, Mich.

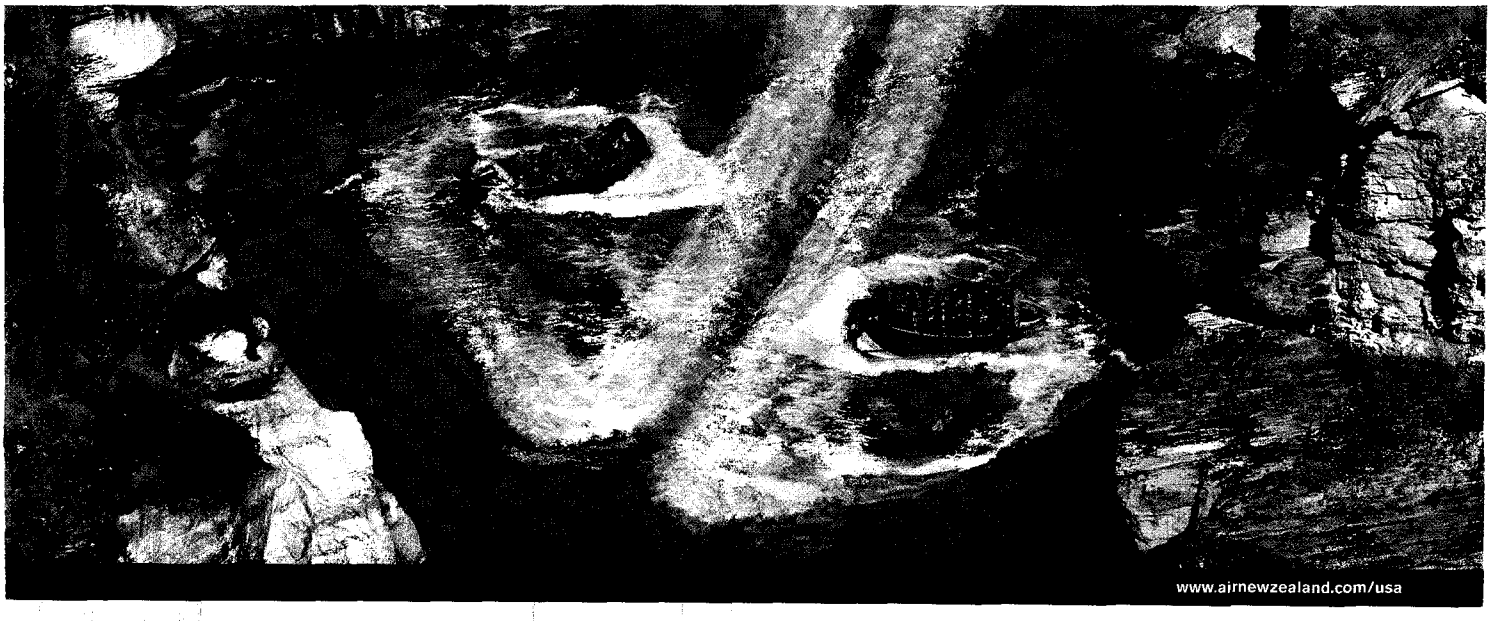
The announcement of the 2004 Student Writing Contest (September *Atlantic*) is uncomfortably reminiscent of a mid-century movie called *The Man With the Golden Arm.* Your announcement plagiarizes the ad for that movie, and while that may not be illegal after fifty years, it is unethical.

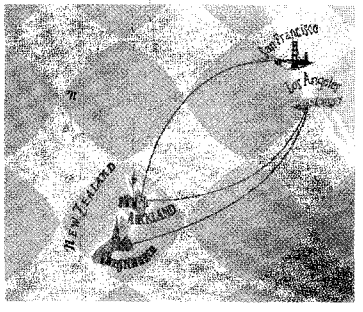
Tom Schiller
Kansas City, Mo.

The Editors reply:

The poster for The Man With the Golden Arm *was the work of Saul Bass, one of the greatest designers of the twentieth century. Our announcement—and the listing of the contest winners, which appears in this issue—were meant as an homage to his work, with the addition of the pencil intended as a subtle visual joke about writers and their golden arms. The typography and the color scheme were inspired by Bass's movie poster for Alfred Hitchcock's* Vertigo.

This sort of humorous pastiche is common, and is rarely resented or resisted by the original artists.





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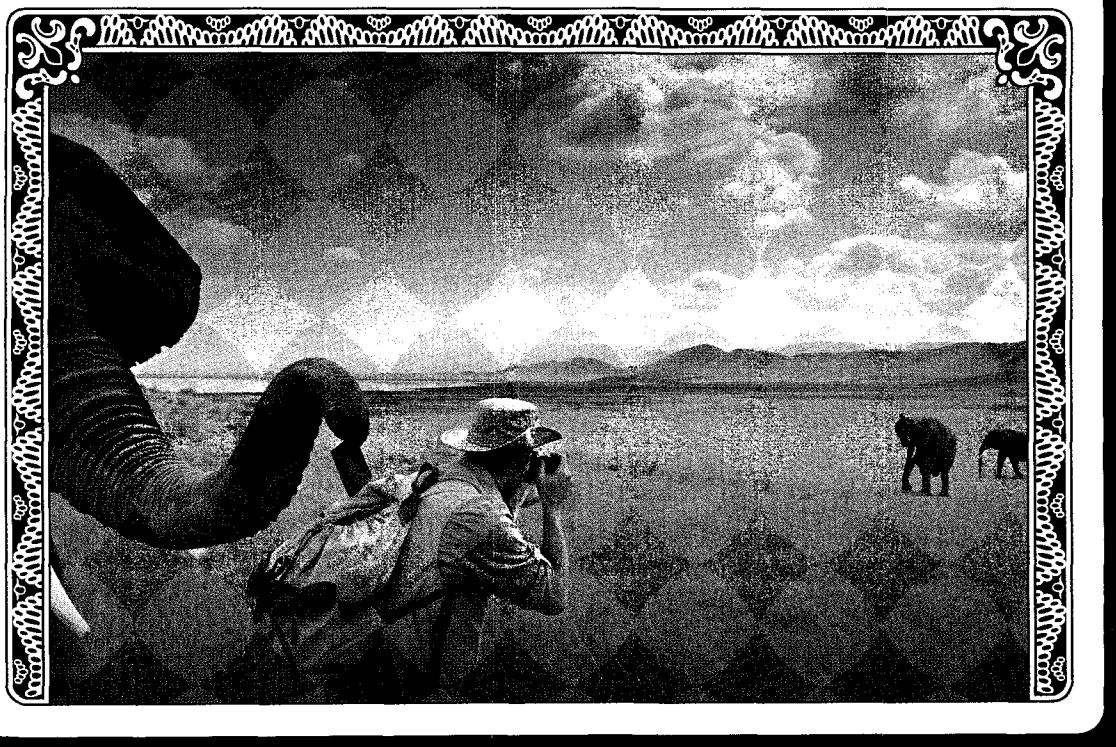

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COMMENT

Will Israel Live to 100?

Don't be seduced by the recent hopeful signs: in the long run the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain a problem without a solution

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

To the PLO's efforts to rein in its militants and Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners should be added the most heartening recent development in Israeli-Palestinian relations: forces on both sides now wish their own leader dead. That's probably the best evidence that Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, despite previous evidence to the contrary (don't forget that the Israeli prime minister connived in the massacre of Palestinian refugees and that the Palestinian president wrote a dissertation denying the Holocaust), now really do seek peace. Sadly, though, the very circumstances that have pushed both sides toward accommodation militate against it. Indeed, they point toward catastrophe.

The Palestinian-Zionist contest is rooted in and remains vexed by land and demographics. The founders of Zionism may have enunciated the strikingly obtuse slogan "A land without people for a people without land," but in fact they fully grasped that making an Arab land into a Jewish state required upending demographic reality by implanting a huge foreign population and, in the parlance of the time, "transferring"—voluntarily if possible, forcibly if necessary—large numbers of Palestine's indigenous inhabitants from those areas intended for Jewish statehood. For their part, the Palestinians rejected proposals in 1937 (the Peel Commission report) and 1947 (UN Resolution 181—which, Palestinians protested, designated as Jewish a state that contained 500,000 Jews but fully 400,000 Arabs) to divide the land between Arab and Jew. The rejection of any Jewish state in Palestine defined the Palestinians' national movement from its inception, in the 1920s, until at least the early 1990s (many Israelis believe, with some justification, that the same rejectionism fuels that movement to this day). And the "basic tenet of Palestinism," say Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal in their definitive and sympathetic history of the Palestinians, continues to be the "right of return" for those 700,000 Palestinians displaced from Israeli territory in 1948 and their descendants (a population that may now number as many as five million)—which if exercised would mean the end of a Jewish majority in Israel.

Owing to the flight of those refugees and to the mass immigration of Jews in the late 1940s and the 1950s, Palestinians at first

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made up a small minority of the Jewish state's total population. But, of course, since the June 1967 war Israel has occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—land overwhelmingly inhabited by Palestinians. And even more important in the long run, Yasir Arafat's adage that the Palestinians' best weapon is the womb has proved true. The birth rate in the occupied territories is far higher than Israel's. Jews will very soon become a minority in the lands they occupy or rule from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean (by some calculations this has already happened), and some demographers forecast that in fifteen years they will make up as little as 42 percent of the population in this area. For decades Israelis debated the wisdom of annexing the territories, but in just five years a consensus has emerged within the Israeli political, military, and intelligence communities that the country must withdraw from much of, most of, or essentially all of the territories (those distinctions are of course a crucial issue for the Palestinians), lest Israeli Jews be forced to choose between living in a democracy and living in a Jewish state: Palestinians will demand not their own state but a single binational state, based on the principle of one man, one vote. And at that point, Israel's deputy prime minister, Ehud Olmert, has said despairingly, "we will lose everything."

Fearing that more and more Palestinians believe time is on their side, and that they will thus be tempted by the "one-state solution," the Sharon government pushed for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (where Palestinians outnumber Jews 150 to one) and the building of the security fence to separate and insulate the Jewish state from the Palestinians (although it's not now routed along the Green Line, the fence would divide nearly all West Bank Palestinians from Israel). The fence has been rightly touted as an anti-terrorism barrier, but in fact it was conceived before the Palestinians' suicide-bombing campaign, as a means of detaching Israel politically and economically from the growing and impoverished Palestinian population; indeed, an Israeli geographer who has intensely studied the political implications of Palestinian population growth, Arnon Soffer, has described the fence as "a last desperate attempt to save the state of Israel." (Soffer advocates ceding East Jerusalem as well as predominantly Arab areas within Israel's *pre*-1967 borders to help defuse the demographic time bomb.)

The very circumstances that have pushed both the Israelis and the Palestinians toward accommodation militate against achieving an enduring peace. Indeed, they point toward catastrophe.

Sharon's unilateral efforts at disengagement—which would have preserved more Jewish settlements and granted the Palestinians less territory than do existing peace plans, and which would have created a separate but hardly sovereign Palestinian entity composed of detached cantons—have spurred Abbas to enter negotiations. Better to parley, the Palestinian leadership no doubt reasoned, than be forced to accede to the Israeli-imposed facts on the ground. In that case, why can't we expect that in fact the political problems created by demographics and land may lead to a binding and mutually satisfactory peace? First and most obviously, the gap between what Palestinian and Israeli leaders will agree to and what their constituencies will abide by is huge. Every sensible person on the left or the right concurs on the necessary steps, but the Israeli political system and national temperament seem to make those steps impossible to take. After nearly forty years of settlement building on the West Bank, for instance, those settlements close to the Green Line may have roots too deep and may well be too integral to the daily life of too many Israelis to be forsaken—perhaps by design. This is nothing, of course, compared with the obstacles that Palestinian moderates face. Groups such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, which are committed to Israel's destruction, are hardly on the fringe. And Palestinians seem to demand the right of return as adamantly as Israelis oppose it: 98.7 percent of refugees surveyed in 2001 dismissed compensation in place of return. Among nonrefugees polled the figure was 93.1 percent. Given that Abbas has promised to submit a "final status" agreement to a plebiscite of Palestinians in the occupied territories and throughout the Arab world (a promise all but ignored in the Western press), the chances of a real peace (as opposed to what the Palestinians call a *hudna*—a tactical truce) appear to be slim.

But even assuming that a comprehensive settlement could be reached, Israel's long-term prospects are bleak. The late Faisal Husseini, a moderate PLO official and a scion of one of Arab Jerusalem's great families, said, "I worry about today. But the Israelis should worry about the future." Today the Palestinian cause is fragmented, and its people are exhausted. Israel, on the other hand, negotiates from a position of unassailable military strength. But the Zionist enterprise has never been able to transcend the demographic and geographic realities that have haunted it from its inception. Regardless of the moral opprobrium one might attach to either party, the seeds of the all-but-unsolvable Palestinian-refugee problem were sown when Israel recognized in 1948 that it couldn't function with a vast and hostile Palestinian population (indeed, even the relatively small number of Palestinians who remained in Israel after the war for independence lived under military rule until 1966). Today Israeli Arabs (that is, Palestinians living within Israel's pre-1967 borders and in East Jerusalem) have one of the highest population-growth rates in the world (among Israeli Arabs in the Negev, specifically, it is *the* highest), and they

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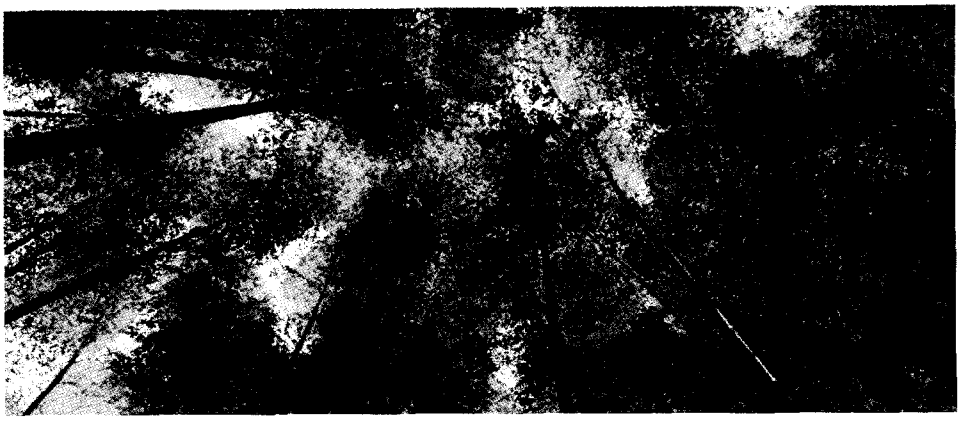

The value of seeing the whole forest.

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now make up about 20 percent of Israel's population; demographers project that they'll compose nearly a quarter of the population by 2020, and as much as 30 percent by 2050. (These figures don't count the approximately 150,000 Palestinian noncitizens, drawn to Israel largely by the prospect of higher-paying jobs, who live there illegally.) Such large antagonistic minorities have historically engendered conflict and calls for binationalism, which would further weaken the Jewish state.

More troublesome still, a future Palestinian state hemmed in between the Green Line and the Jordan and in the Gaza Strip will face astronomical population growth (the population in Gaza now doubles every generation, and an enormous influx of former refugees now living throughout the Arab world—mostly in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—is almost certain), scarce water, and dire economic conditions. (The obvious outlet for Palestinian labor—Israel—will perforce be tightly closed; otherwise the sort of creeping immigration the United States has experienced from Mexico would swamp Israel, thereby subverting efforts to maintain a Jewish state.) A host of realistic Israeli observers, including Israel's national security adviser, General Giora Eiland, doubt that the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan contains enough land and resources to sustain two viable sovereign states. In few places in the world do conditions more demand that two peoples develop a symbiotic relationship; in no other place are the chances of building such a relationship more remote.

Whatever accommodation is made now, it seems inevitable that given the future that confronts a Palestinian state, its expansionist energies will be directed toward Israel (and, to a lesser extent, Jordan). At that point Palestinian leaders seeking further territorial revision will no doubt argue, correctly, that the Green Line was a cease-fire line, not an international boundary; that that line itself awards Israel territory won in war; and that it in no way resembles the boundaries of the UN partition resolution upon which the Jewish state was founded. David Ben-Gurion always urged his people to accept even the smallest Jewish state, arguing that it would serve as a springboard for future expansion. Palestine, he saw, would be taken over in stages. Today Israelis understandably fear that either by design or merely in response to exigencies it may be taken back in the same piecemeal fashion.

At some level most perceptive Israelis seem to grasp these future existential dangers. In fact, in conversations with Israelis on the left and the (moderate) right in academe, the military, the government, and the security services, I've been struck by their grim declarations that they as a people aren't going anywhere, but also by their foreboding about the country their children will live in. Most of all, though, I've been struck by the frequency with which these men and women—patriots all—have wistfully said, "We should have taken Uganda" (which Britain offered to the Zionist leadership in 1903). History shows that many problems have no solution—a fact all but unfathomable to Americans. Nevertheless, the century-long Palestinian-Zionist conflict is a story of two peoples, each with reasonable claims to the same piece of earth; and nearly every aspect of that story suggests that in the end—and to the detriment of those peoples, their region, and perhaps the entire world—their aspirations are not amenable to compromise.

Israel's long-term prospects are bleak. The Zionist enterprise has never been able to transcend the demographic realities that have haunted it from its inception.

Benjamin Schwarz is the literary editor and national editor of The Atlantic.

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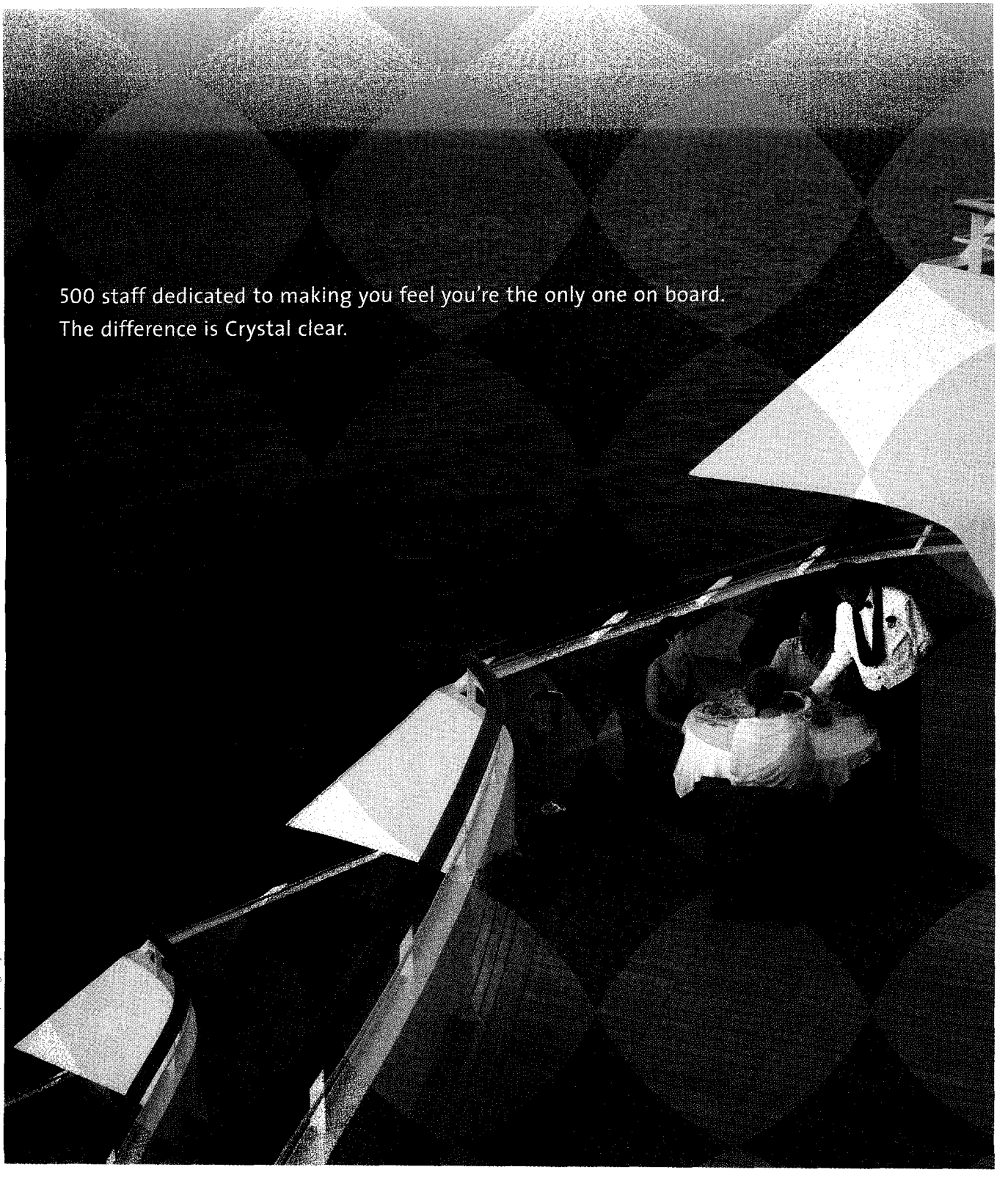

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THE MILITARY

Gas Pains

One of the U.S. military's greatest vulnerabilities in Iraq is its enormous appetite for fuel. The insurgents have figured this out

BY ROBERT BRYCE

The Department of Defense now has about 27,000 vehicles in Iraq—and every one of them gets lousy gas mileage. To power that fleet the Defense Logistics Agency must move huge quantities of fuel into the country in truck convoys from Kuwait, Turkey, and Jordan. All that fuel gives American soldiers a tremendous battlefield advantage (in communications, mobility, and firepower, among other things). But overseeing and carrying out this process requires the work of some 20,000 American soldiers and private contractors. Every day some 2,000 trucks leave Kuwait alone for various locales in Iraq.

In addition to the challenges posed by the volume of fuel needed, the Army's logisticians must deal with the sheer variety of fuels. Although the Pentagon has tried to reduce the number of fuels it consumes, and now relies primarily on a jet-fuel-like substance called JP-8, the Defense Energy Support Center is currently supplying fourteen kinds of fuel to U.S. troops in Iraq.

In short, the American GI is the most energy-consuming soldier ever seen on the field of war. For computers and GPS units, Humvees and helicopters, the modern soldier is in constant need of energy: battery power, electric power, and petroleum. The U.S. military now uses about 1.7 million gallons of fuel a day in Iraq. Some of that fuel goes to naval vessels and aircraft, but even factoring out JP-5 fuel (which is what the Navy primarily uses), each of the 150,000 soldiers on the ground consumes roughly nine gallons of fuel a day. And that figure has been rising.

Some of the rise in consumption is due to the insurgents' use of improvised explosive devices, which account for about 30 percent of all American combat deaths since the occupation began. As John Pike, the executive director of GlobalSecurity.org, told me, "This is a war of convoy ambushes and car bombs. There is no front line." Perhaps hundreds of American vehicles have been destroyed by IEDs (the exact number is classified), and hundreds of soldiers—many of them guarding convoys—have been killed or injured by them. (And more than sixty-five private contractors are known to have been killed by convoy attacks or IEDs since July of 2003.) Cheap, easy to use, and highly effective, IEDs have forced the Americans to add armor to their fleet of Humvees in Iraq. A fully armored Humvee weighs more than five tons—and requires a larger engine and heavier suspension than the non-armored model. The Army also recently allocated more than $500 million to add armor to its utility trucks.

The added armor will help protect U.S. soldiers from IEDs and snipers—but it also means higher fuel consumption for their vehicles. Which means, in turn, that more tanker trucks will have to be driven into Iraq—and those trucks will provide more targets for the insurgents, who have become skilled at attacking them. It's difficult to guard them all. When insurgents see that American patrols are increasing in one region, they can quickly and easily shift their attacks—on fueling stations, pipelines, truck convoys, refineries—to another region.

It's a vicious cycle: attacks on convoys produce a need for more armor, which produces a need for more fuel, which produces larger convoys, which produce more targets for attack. Over the past six months the Army and the Air Force have had to specially train more than 1,000 additional soldiers to perform convoy security. One tank commander, who returned from Iraq last spring, told me that he had been so concerned about his supply lines that he had stationed sentries at one-mile intervals along the highway in his sector.

Logistics is an old and critically important issue in war. During World War II the German general Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps was stymied in North Africa by a shortage of fuel for its tanks. A lack of gasoline also halted the gallop across France of General George Patton's Third Army in the summer of 1944. The Third Army had about 400,000 men and used about 400,000 gallons of gasoline a day. Today the Pentagon has about a third that number of troops in Iraq—yet they use more than four times as much fuel.

Given that the longer the fuel supply lines, the greater the vulnerability for our military, logic would suggest we try to reduce our fuel requirements. But over the past several decades the Pentagon has bought billions of dollars' worth of tanks, trucks, and other vehicles with little or no consideration to their fuel efficiency. In decades past,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

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U.S. Army logisticians assumed that 50 percent of the tonnage moved onto a battlefield was ammunition, 30 percent was fuel, and the rest was food, water, and supplies. Today the fuel component may be as high as 70 percent, according to a study done in 2001 by the Defense Science Board.

The insurgents' tactics may not stop the flow of motor fuel to American troops, but they are part of the broader war that is forcing the United States and its allies in Iraq to defend every pipeline, every refinery, every tanker truck, and every fuel depot. Even in peacetime that's a difficult task.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military in Iraq is in a bind. It has no choice but to continue fortifying its vehicles with armor and pumping imported fuel into, for example, the Bradley fighting vehicle (which gets less than two miles per gallon) and the M1 Abrams tank (less than one mile per gallon). But all the fuel demanded by those armaments and vehicles creates logistical and military headaches. The tank commander I spoke to told me that soldiers on the ground are beginning to see that "the more fuel-efficient we are, the more tactically sound we are."

But U.S. military commanders seem not to see that connection. At the conclusion of its study the DSB recommended that the Pentagon make fuel efficiency a key consideration when buying new weapons systems. The Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissed the proposal in August of that year.

Richard Truly, a former astronaut who recently retired as the head of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, chaired the DSB study. "The thing we were trying to get across was that this doesn't have anything to do with moral values," Truly told me. "It has to do with running the goddamn military with as little fuel as possible and showing the advantages to the warfighter himself—so that instead of having ten fuel trucks, you can have five." Unfortunately, Truly says, the prevailing wisdom at the Pentagon is that "fuel efficiency is for sissies."

Robert Bryce is the author of Cronies: Oil, the Bushes, and the Rise of Texas, America's Superstate *and* Pipe Dreams: Greed, Ego, and the Death of Enron.

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BRIEF LIVES

The Apocalypse, Rated PG

Can a socially conservative Christian Republican succeed in Hollywood? By investing millions in a movie of C. S. Lewis's The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, *Philip Anschutz is betting he can*

BY ROSS DOUTHAT

When Jamie Foxx bounded onto the stage to accept his Golden Globe for *Ray*, in January, he thanked his grandmother, and then he thanked his "Caucasian" director, Taylor Hackford, for "taking a chance on this beautiful black film." Finally, and effusively, he thanked Philip Anschutz.

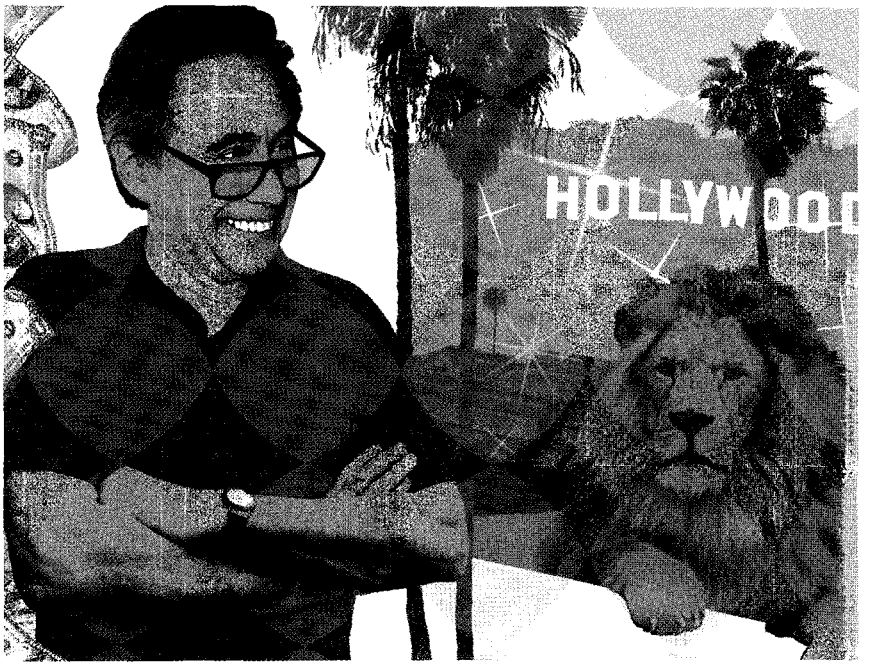
If this prompted a few of NBC's 16 million–odd viewers to wonder *Philip who?*—well, that's probably just how the elusive Mr. Anschutz wanted it.

Here is what we know about Philip Anschutz: He is worth more than $5 billion—down from $18 billion at the height of the 1990s boom, when Qwest Communications, which he founded, was one of the highest of the high-flying tech stocks. He is a devout Presbyterian and a staunch Republican who has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to right-leaning candidates over the past decade. He lives with his wife of thirty-five years in Denver, in a modest-by-billionaire-standards house he built more than twenty years ago, and has three grown children. He owns oil fields, railroad lines, the country's finest collection of western art, a network of farms and cattle ranches, five Major League Soccer franchises, Regal Entertainment (the country's largest chain of movie theaters), and two daily newspapers—the revived San Francisco *Examiner* and the newly launched D.C. tabloid of the same name. (He has also secured the rights to the name *Examiner* in more than sixty other cities.)

And all this may have been merely a prologue to his newest career—as a Hollywood mogul, a champion of "family-friendly" entertainment, and the man behind both *Ray* and the much anticipated film version of C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which rolls out in the fall as a lavish, $150 million production of Anschutz's Walden Media (the child-centric division of his Anschutz Film Group) and Walt Disney Pictures.

Here's what we don't know about Philip Anschutz: everything else.

It's not only that Anschutz doesn't sit for interviews, which he has assiduously avoided since 1974. It's that he has managed to maintain an almost perfect anonymity (broken only by the occasional "Who is Philip Anschutz?" article that appears in whatever region is graced with his latest business venture) despite having attained a level of wealth and influence notable even by the rarefied standards of the American billionaire class.



Anschutz was anonymous in the late 1990s, when high-tech entrepreneurs were regularly fêted and profiled and hailed as heroes of the age—and he was still anonymous in 2002, during Qwest's messy post-bubble slide, when names like Kozlowski and Ebbers and Lay were synonymous with corporate chicanery. He's unknown on the streets (though presumably not in the boardrooms) of Beverly Hills, where he out-negotiated several other studios for the rights to Lewis's Narnia books. And he's even relatively unknown in Denver, where he reportedly runs in marathons without being recognized—this in a metropolis whose skyline is dominated by the blue QWEST sign emblazoned on one of the tallest skyscrapers downtown.

Whether this invisible-man routine will survive Anschutz's venture into Hollywood is uncertain. Not only has he jumped—with both feet and hundreds of millions of dollars—into the most publicity-happy business arena in the country, but he's a Republican and a devout Christian making movies in a left-wing town and a polarized nation. In the era of red states and blue television, of Janet Jackson and Mel Gibson, Philip Anschutz's bid to become a big-time moviemaker would at first blush seem doomed to founder.

That is, if it didn't appear to be going—quietly, quietly—so very well.

Anschutz was born in 1939, in the small town of Great Bend, Kansas; he attended high school in Wichita and college at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Upon graduating, he passed up law school to follow his father into the oil business, and became a wildcat-

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ter, drilling dozens of holes in hopes of a big score. In 1967 he hit the jackpot at a field in Gillette, Wyoming—but shortly after he had bought up all the surrounding land on credit, his new field was accidentally set ablaze.

Out of money and facing ruin, Anschutz came up with an inspired solution. Universal Studios was just then filming a John Wayne vehicle based on the life of Red Adair, the famous oil-fire fighter, and Anschutz quickly talked the studio into paying him $100,000 for the privilege of filming Adair putting out his oil-field fire. The footage went into the movie, and Anschutz's investment was saved.

A decade later he and his father uncovered a billion-barrel oil pocket in northern Utah, and in 1982, just before oil prices collapsed, he sold a significant portion of the pocket to Mobil for $500 million. Anschutz then formed an investment group and began going after publicly held companies. Among his acquisitions was a small Colorado railroad company, which he later used in a leveraged buyout of the much larger Southern Pacific Railroad. Southern Pacific eventually merged with Union Pacific, forming a railroad goliath and earning Anschutz around a billion dollars.

But the railroads themselves weren't the real prize—it was their right-of-way privileges, negotiated with the federal government during the nineteenth century. These allowed Anschutz to lay the thousands of miles of telecom cable that would make Qwest Communications an Internet-boom powerhouse.

Through it all Anschutz cultivated his low profile and his "billionaire next door" habits: churchgoing in a local Presbyterian parish, marathons and mountain climbing, his daily drive to work in a used Buick. He didn't even maintain a public-relations outfit. When the Internet bubble burst and the SEC began investigating Qwest executives (though not Anschutz himself), reporters' calls were often redirected to the office of Anschutz's legal counsel. The ensuing publicity was predictably awful: in 2002 *Fortune* dubbed him the country's "greediest executive" for stock sell-offs that netted $1.5 billion (though he lost nearly $10 billion on the stock he didn't sell).

Today the Anschutz Company is slightly more media-savvy. Anschutz's spokesman, Jim Monaghan, an avuncular man in his fifties, met me at a Denver bar and held forth genially on the subject of his mysterious employer. But even Monaghan, with his potbelly, checkered shirt, and graying whiskers, seemed more like an anti-PR man—the perfect spokesman, perhaps, for a boss who once complained to a reporter, "Why do you keep calling me 'billionaire Philip Anschutz'? My mother never called me 'billionaire'!"

On one level Anschutz's Hollywood venture is of a piece with his earlier investments—the goal is to make money. But his film company is determinedly family-friendly; don't look for Anschutz to make an R-rated movie anytime soon. He sees this as a moral question, but also as a sound business plan. In one of his rare public speeches, delivered last winter at a leadership seminar in Florida sponsored by Hillsdale College, a conservative school in rural Michigan, he commented, "It is of utmost importance for a business to try and figure out a way to make goods and products that people actually want to buy ... I don't think Hollywood understands this very well, because they keep making the same old movies ... despite the fact that so many Americans are tired of seeing them."

His logic is sound: of the 100 all-time top-grossing movies, just thirteen were rated R. But is a Republican and a social conservative—rarer in Hollywood than a natural blonde—the right person to tap into this market? And is profit the main motive in his movie-making ambitions? After all, just before Anschutz entered the movie business, an associate described him as wanting to be "doing something significant in American Christianity."

Anschutz Film Group executives in Hollywood, veterans of the entertainment business, dismiss the notion that the company has a religious mission. And indeed, thus far AFG's movies have been starkly nonsectarian, celebrating the overcoming of obstacles and the triumph of the human spirit. In several instances Walden Media has successfully mined high-quality children's novels: the film version of Louis Sachar's

INFLATION *by Istvan Banyai*

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THE LIST

WHITE HOUSE CHEFS

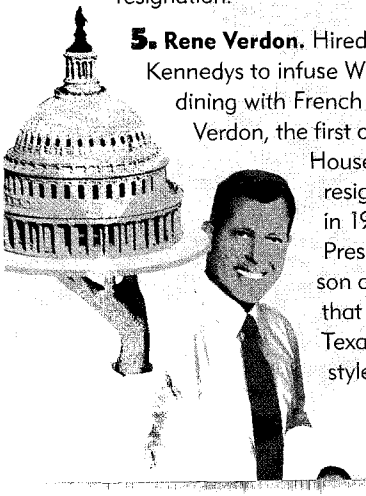
Before he quit, in February, Walter Scheib III had been White House chef for a decade. Hired by Hillary Clinton to replace longtime chef Pierre Chambrin, Scheib left as he had arrived—amid controversy. Rumors swirled that he and Laura Bush had clashed over style. Drama is nothing new in the White House kitchen, which has gotten awfully hot over the years. Here is a sampling of chefs who have stirred the White House pot. —*TYLER CABOT*

1. Franette McCulloch. In 2000, claiming that executive pastry chef Roland Mesnier punished her with menial tasks for refusing sex, this assistant pastry chef sued Mesnier and his boss, President Bill Clinton, for $1 million apiece. The suit was later dropped.

2. Sean Haddon. An assistant chef, Haddon claimed that his interracial marriage led to discrimination and denied him a promotion to sous chef in 1992. After he filed a formal complaint (which he lost), rumors circulated that he had threatened to poison the First Family. A Secret Service polygraph test exonerated him of wrongdoing.

3. Pierre Chambrin. Fired by the Clintons in 1994 for refusing to drop his fat-laden French menu for a healthier American one, Chambrin later claimed to have been let go because he was overweight and spoke with a thick French accent.

4. Henry Haller. Recruited by the Johnsons from New York's Sheraton East in 1966, this Swiss-trained chef served five presidents over twenty-one years. His most famous meal may have been President Nixon's last: one poached egg with corned-beef hash followed immediately by one letter of resignation.



5. Rene Verdon. Hired by the Kennedys to infuse White House dining with French elegance, Verdon, the first official White House chef, resigned in 1965 when President Johnson demanded that he cook Texas-ranch style.

best-selling book *Holes* was Anschutz's first bona fide hit, and current projects (including *Because of Winn-Dixie*, which was released in February, and *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Charlotte's Web*, which are in production) are aimed at a similar audience.

But *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is different. For one thing, Walden Media and Disney, the film's distributor, are thinking really, really big; they have in mind the epic scale (and epic profits) of *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*. For another, the Narnia series is an explicit Christian allegory; the lion, Aslan, is an obvious Christ figure, and the climactic act of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* might be described as "The Passion of the Lion." Nor are Anschutz and company shying away from Lewis's Christian cachet: Disney will launch a marketing campaign of religious outreach to coincide with the movie's December release, and has retained a public-relations firm that specializes in reaching Christian audiences—and that did some of the marketing for *The Passion of the Christ*.

A successful *Lion* would mean that Anschutz could start gearing up for the next six Narnia movies, culminating with an Armageddon story that features Muslim-like villains and a decidedly biblical Last Judgment.

This plan is not without controversy, and for Disney in particular it's a gamble. The company has long avoided cultural conflict (for instance, it balked at distributing Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*), and some critics will doubtless view acknowledging the Christian themes in Narnia as a violation of some kind of unwritten establishment clause concerning the separation of religion and mass culture. On the other hand, if the marketing campaign (or the movie itself, which thus far has been kept tightly under wraps) tries to downplay the story's strong religious undertones, it may turn off a large number of Narnia's fans, who don't want to see the Christian content of Lewis's work diluted.

All this would probably cause some discomfort in the film industry even if the project weren't backed by a believer. But Hollywood hasn't hesitated to work with the new Christian in town. James Cameron, the director of *Titanic* and other big-budget mainstream fare, partnered with Walden on his recent undersea documentaries; the writer and director John Sayles, whose *Silver City* suggests that he's no fan of red-state tycoons, has signed on to script a project about the athlete Jim Thorpe; and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is directed by Andrew Adamson, whose work includes the two Shrek movies.

If the $150 million venture into Narnia flops, of course, it could be devastating to Anschutz's Tinseltown venture. But if it succeeds—well, Hollywood loves a winner, and presumably there will be none of the lingering ire that has dogged Mel Gibson. A successful *Lion* would also mean that Anschutz could start gearing up for the next six Narnia movies—probably culminating around 2015 or so with *The Last Battle*, a Narnian Armageddon that features Muslim-like villains; subtle riffs on faith, atheism, and damnation; and a decidedly biblical Last Judgment.

It's the best children's story about the Apocalypse ever written, and it might just be the movie that Philip Anschutz was born to make. Beneath the flashbulb-shy exterior, one suspects, abides the soul of a dreamer. "My friends think I'm a candidate for a lobotomy," he remarked at the close of his Florida speech, "but you know what? I don't care. If we can make some movies that have a positive effect on people's lives and on our culture, that's enough for me."

Hollywood has long been a graveyard for such idealists. But most of them didn't have $5 billion to play with.

Ross Douthat is an Atlantic *reporter-researcher, and the author of* Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class, *which has just been published.*

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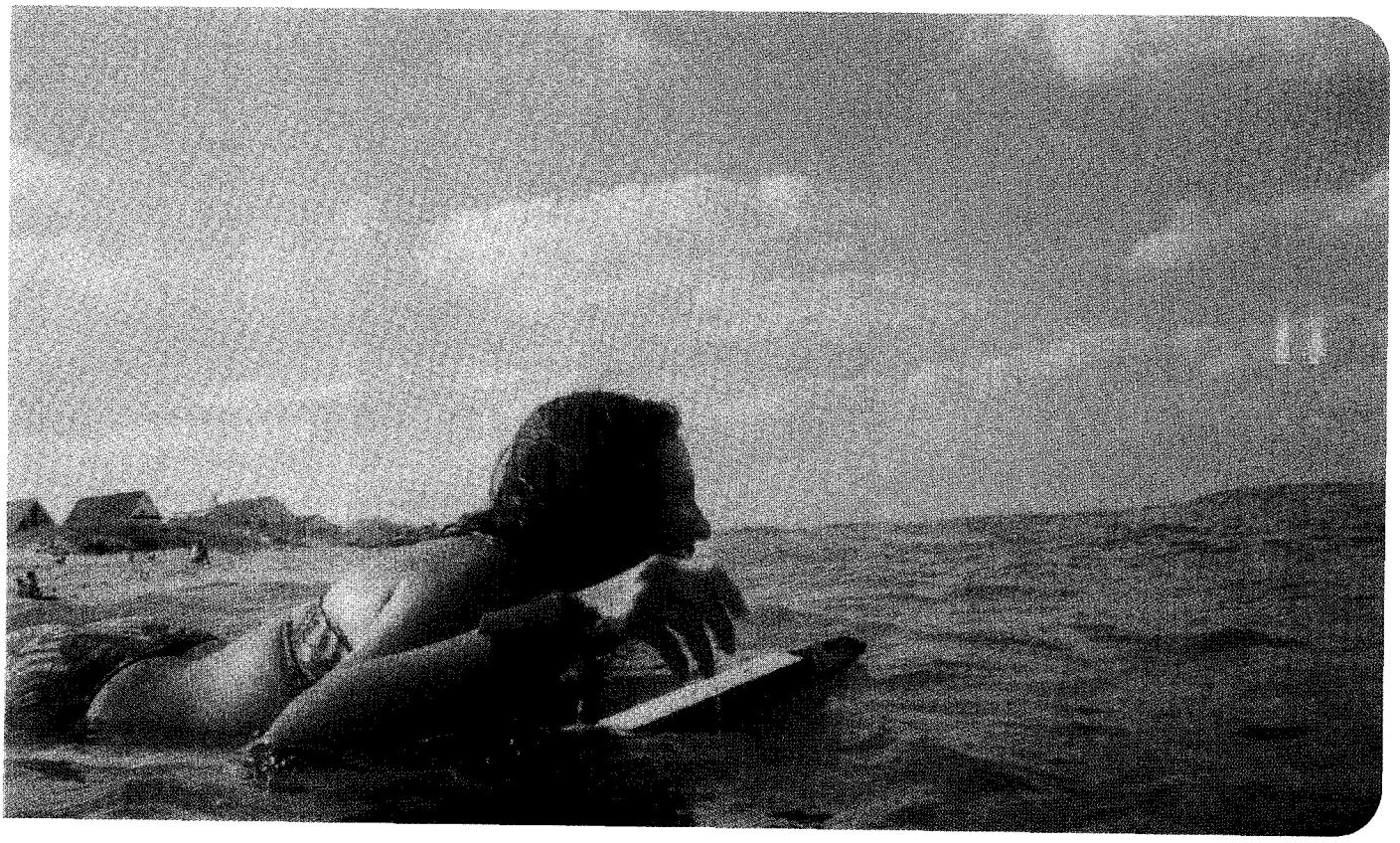

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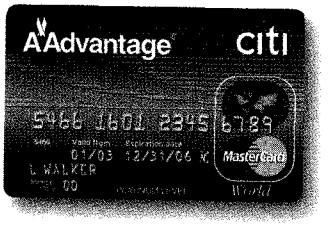

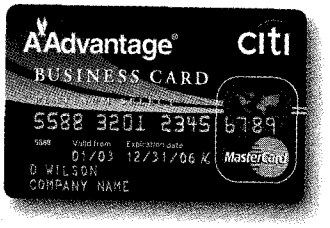

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THE ART OF POLICY

Freedom, Responsibility… and What?

Social Security reform—an explanation

BY P. J. O'ROURKE

Social Security funding, as a plot device, makes for a languidly paced political thriller. The president discovers a ticking time bomb that's been sitting in plain view for seventy years. It must be disarmed, either with mildly risky partial privatization or with somewhat hazardous tax and benefit adjustments. Cut the blue-state wire? Cut the red-state wire? Only thirteen years to decide before Social Security starts paying out more than it takes in. Or thirty-seven years, if you wait until the accumulated surplus in the Social Security Trust Fund runs out. Then the damp squib goes off, giving ever querulous Generation X something else to complain about.

The pundits who deny that the crisis exists are as shrill as the prophets of doom. The liberal economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman claims,

> The people who hustled America into a tax cut to eliminate an imaginary budget surplus and a war to eliminate imaginary weapons are now trying another bum's rush. If they succeed, we will … dismantle Social Security, a program that is in much better financial shape than the rest of the federal government.

In thirteen years every aspect of the universe can change—ask a thirteen-year-old. And "much better financial shape than the rest of the federal government" is hardly a reassuring statement. But the political side-taking on reforming Social Security is suddenly, urgently bitter. Maybe this is a sign of health (not to mention longevity) in our democratic system. Politics is—once in a while—a forum for serious debate about political philosophy. The disputation so far:

> PRO: Without responsibility there is no freedom. Social Security privatization restores individual responsibility.
>
> CON: Some individuals are irresponsible. (An elitist argument for populists to be making—but then, that's populism.)
>
> PRO: Today's worker has a promised return of less than two percent on money he or she pays into the Social Security system.
>
> CON: Today's Enron shareholder has a promised return of bubkes, nada, squat.
>
> PRO: In 1950 the ratio of workers to Social Security beneficiaries was 16:1. By the time current twenty-year-olds retire, there will be only two workers for every retiree.
>
> CON: Hey, that's my dad!
>
> CON: Pension privatization has a sketchy track record. The British got confused and cheated, and the government had to intervene. The Swedes (of all people) made too many volatile investments. Chile's system is working—by Chilean standards.
>
> PRO: Insurance companies have been doing this kind of thing since Antonio was a merchant of Venice, and insurance companies go broke less often than governments.
>
> PRO: Privatization transition costs are negligible. We borrow money today to settle tomorrow's Social Security Trust Fund liabilities. The net effect on government finances is zero.
>
> CON: Privatization transition costs are huge. Markets aren't frightened by tomorrow's Social Security Trust Fund liabilities. Markets are frightened by today's borrowing, with its flood of government bonds. (Thus believers that government is the only adequate guarantor of future benefits are arguing that nobody believes those benefits will be paid.)

This serious debate should get more serious.

The Social Security Trust Fund that's supposed to last us until 2042—there isn't any money in it. There never was. Modern money, so-called "fiat money," is a government IOU. The government cannot create a trust fund by saving its own IOUs any more than I can create a trust fund by writing "I start getting money when I turn twenty-one" on a piece of paper. The Social Security Trust Fund is just such a piece of paper. Except it says, "I start getting money when I turn sixty-five—the government promises."

Consult American Indians for a further discussion of government promises.

Is Social Security a pension scheme—a matter of freedom, responsibility, and property rights? Or is Social Security a charity—a matter of freedom, responsibility, and civic duties? Both sides want it both ways. Franklin Roosevelt, according to his grandson James, believed that Social Security should be "simple, guaranteed, fair, earned, and available to all Americans." But something that is earned cannot be simple or guaranteed or available to all, and its fairness will be disputable. Meanwhile, no conservative is talking about abandoning the injured, the orphaned, the abject, or the hopelessly goofy.

Social Security (with later help from Medicare and other programs) reduced the poverty rate among the elderly from greater than 50 percent during the Depression to eight percent now. Why is this good deed financed with a 6.2 percent regressive tax on only the first $90,000 of income? (The tax is 12.4 percent if we drop the fiction that employers pay the other half instead of calculating this expense into wages.) An addled Robin Hood of a system waves fare-thee-well to the rich while taking from those of moderate means. And why isn't this good deed means-tested? We don't drop coins in a man's hat when it's a silk topper doffed in his box at the opera.

P. J. O'Rourke is a correspondent for The Atlantic. *His most recent book is* Peace Kills.

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The colonial me

built this nation

with his sweat,

read scripture by candlelight,

sang praises to his true master.

He beat foot trails under the moon

to visit his wife and child,

carrying with him a hand-carved toy,

a coin or two,

and the hope

of what I would become.

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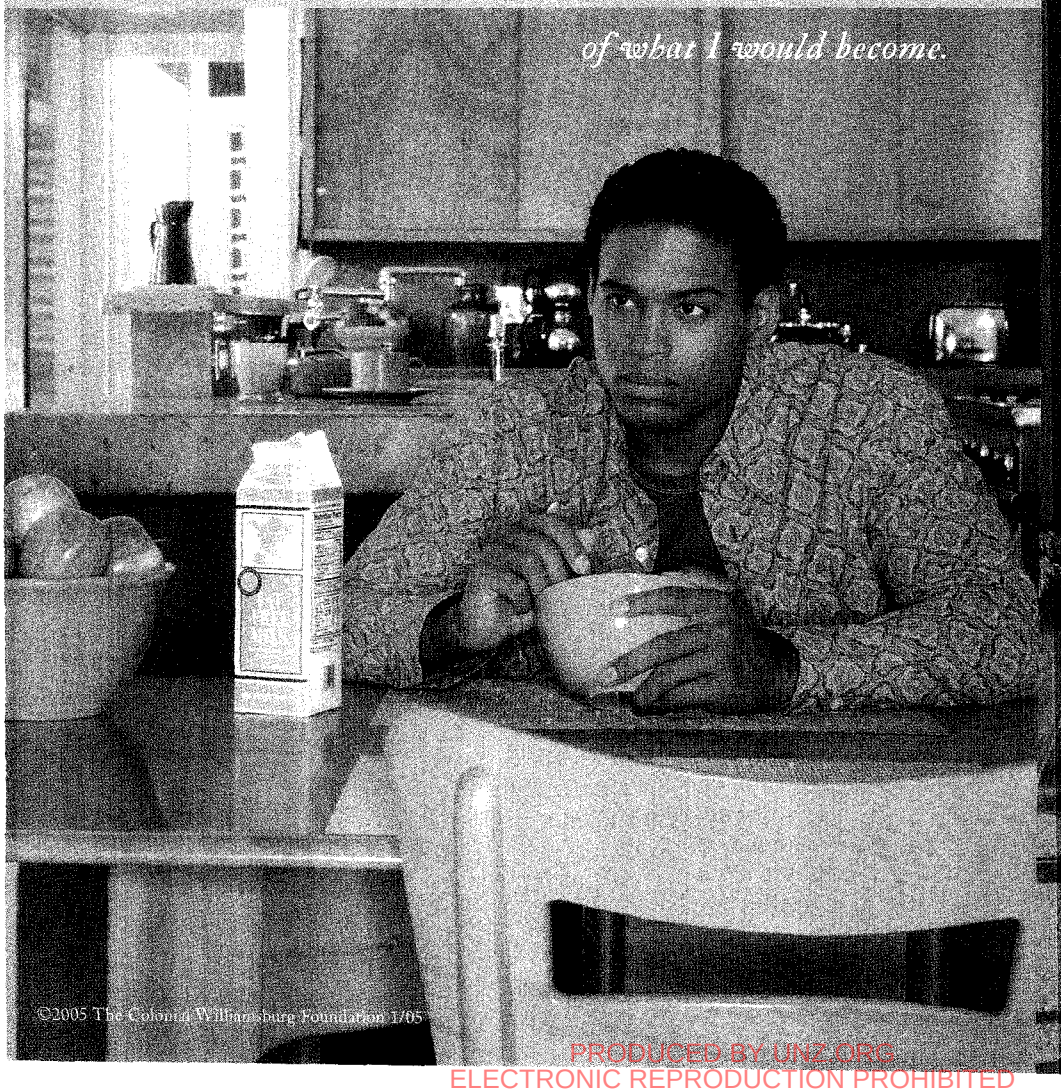

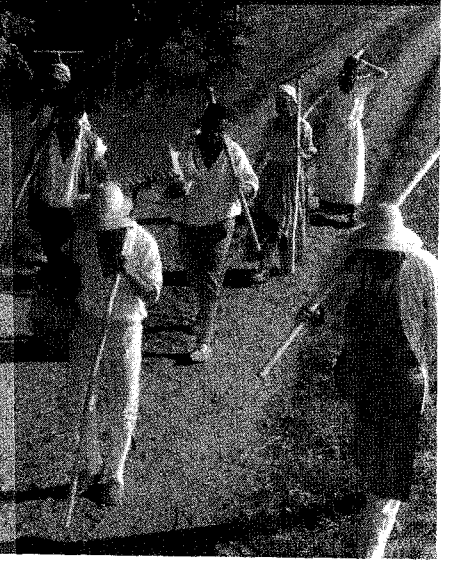

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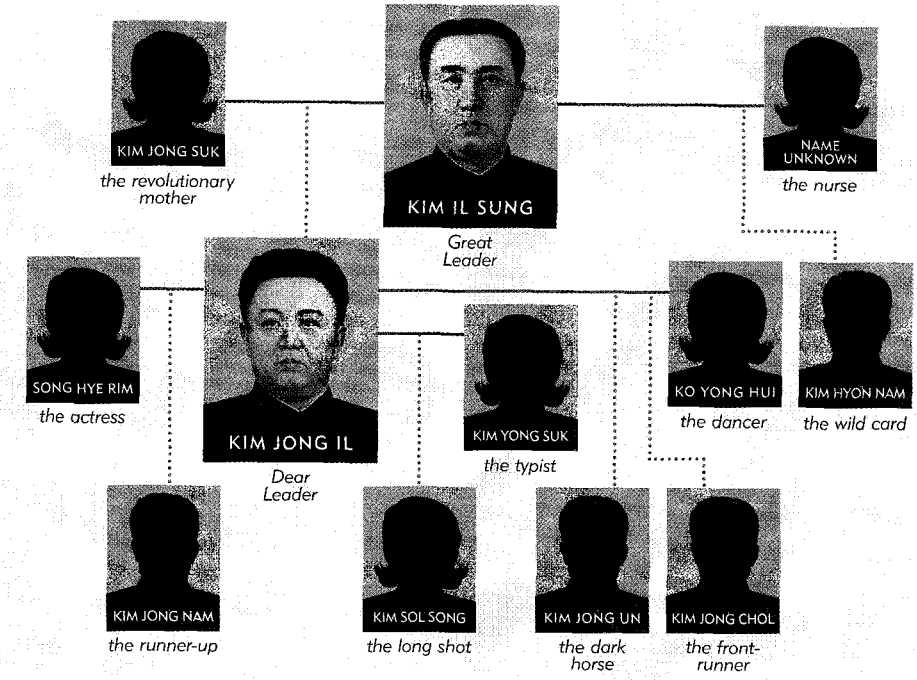
THE ODDS

AFTER KIM JONG IL

When Kim Il Sung, the "president-for-life" of North Korea, turned sixty-two, in 1974, he decided that his son Kim Jong Il would succeed him. Kim Jong Il, who indeed took over when his father died, twenty years later, turned sixty-three in February. The North Korean media have recently been quoting words reportedly spoken by Kim Il Sung: if he himself could not carry out "the final victory of the Korean revolution," then his son would; and if his son couldn't, then his grandson would. Just weeks before his birthday Kim Jong Il announced to North Korea that he would "uphold Father Leader's instructions"—and so it is widely believed that the "Dear Leader" will soon name his own successor. Needless to say, Kim Jong Il's choice of who will complete the revolution is an important one, for North Koreans and for the world. Here are the candidates most likely to continue the Kim dynasty. —TERRENCE HENRY



KIM JONG CHOL: The middle son (born 1981) of Kim Jong Il. His mother was the popular North Korean dancer Ko Yong Hui.
Why he might be the next Dear Leader: Jong Chol's mother, who died last year, seems to have been the subject of a glorification campaign by the state, which referred to her in recent years as "respected mother," "great woman," and "loyal subject to the Dear Leader." A similar campaign glorified Kim Jong Il's mother when he prepared to succeed his father. Ko Yong Hui was rumored to have lobbied vigorously in behalf of her son, using her unusually strong influence on Kim Jong Il to secure a place for Jong Chol in the country's leadership and to banish Kim Jong Il's own brother-in-law—who had been considered a possible replacement for the Dear Leader—from Pyongyang. (She also reportedly got Kim Jong Il to give up drinking.)
Why he might not be: Kim Jong Il may not like his second son much: the dictator, according to his former sushi chef, who worked for him for more than a decade and has written two books about the experience, has called Jong Chol effeminate and said that he is "no good" because he is "too much like a girl."
Verdict: Front-runner. In late 2003 someone referred to as Paek Se Bong—which can be interpreted as "the New Peak of Mount Paektu"—was named to Kim Jong Il's exclusive cabinet, and though there are no published photos of the "New Peak," some South Korean analysts speculate that it is Jong Chol. Mount Paektu is a sacred mountain in Korean mythology, and is known as Kim Jong Il's birthplace. Already one peak of the mountain has been named for Kim Jong Il, and so if Jong Chol is indeed the "New Peak," the moniker could mark him as next in line for the dictatorship. (Another point in Jong Chol's favor is that when Kim Jong Il was rising through the political ranks, he, too, was known by a secret code name: "the Party Center.")

KIM JONG NAM: The oldest son (born 1971) of Kim Jong Il. His mother was the actress Song Hye Rim.
Why he might be the next Dear Leader: Jong Nam has held several key leadership positions in North Korea's secret police, army, and national political party, and he is thought to have brokered secret arms deals. In his youth he was the favorite of his father, who appreciated his love of the military. When Jong Nam turned twenty-four, his father gave him a soldier's uniform with the badges of a general on it. Ever since then he has been known in the People's Republic as "Comrade General." North Korean state television reported in January that his army unit assisted peasant farmers in the north by preparing "good-quality manure."
Why he might not be: Jong Nam's maternal relatives have a bad habit of defecting. Though his mother never did, his aunt and cousins defected. And Jong Nam has had his own trouble with borders: In 2001 he was deported from Japan for carrying a false passport from the Dominican Republic. He claimed he was going to Tokyo Disneyland; South Korean media reported rumors that he was in the country to arrange arms deals. Many analysts suspect he has fallen out of his father's favor after this embarrassing incident. Some South Korean media sources have reported that Jong Nam's two half brothers tried to have him assassinated while he was visiting Austria last year. And in 1997 a cousin was murdered in Seoul by a North Korean death squad after publishing a tell-all about the Kim dynasty.
Verdict: Close runner-up. Jong Nam remains the best-known of the possible heirs. He speaks several languages and is technologically savvy. But the Tokyo incident damaged his reputation, and last year he briefly corresponded with press outside the country, probably angering his father. Using a South Korean Yahoo e-mail account, he conducted a brief correspondence with several Japanese journalists. "Hello, I am Kim Jong Nam," he wrote. "The year-end and New Year are approaching. I wish you good health and happiness."

KIM JONG UN: The youngest (born 1983) of Kim Jong Il's three sons, and one of two he had with Ko Yong Hui.
Why he might be the next Dear Leader: Kim Jong Il's former sushi chef has said that Kim Jong Un is the most favored of the three sons, because of his striking resemblance to his father.

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Why he might not be: He doesn't appear to have held any significant positions in government, and tradition suggests that as the youngest son he is unlikely to be picked.
Verdict: Dark horse. Like Jong Chol, he no longer has his mother around to influence Kim Jong Il.

KIM SOL SONG: Kim Jong Il's daughter (born 1974). Her mother, Kim Yong Suk, was a typist.
Why she might be the next Dear Leader: Sol Song is the only one of the dictator's children whose mother is still alive and able to push for her succession. Trained in economics, she often accompanies Kim Jong Il on government trips, and he reportedly relies on her for advice.
Why she might not be: She's a woman in a society with a strong patriarchal tradition. Also, there has been no propaganda in the state media about her or her mother, who was reportedly replaced in Kim Jong Il's affections by Ko Yong Hui in the mid-1970s.
Verdict: Long shot. Confucian tradition favors passing on leadership to males only, and Kim Il Sung's wish was that the revolution continue through his grandson.

KIM HYON NAM: The illegitimate child (born 1972) of Kim Il Sung and his nurse, which makes him the half brother of Kim Jong Il, who arranged for Hyon Nam's adoption with the help of his now banished brother-in-law.
Why he might be the next Dear Leader: Three years ago he was named to a position of substantial power: head of the Propaganda and Agitation department of the Workers' Party. (Before then few North Koreans even knew of his existence.)
Why he might not be: Hyon Nam's illegitimacy will most likely prevent Kim Jong Il from naming him over one of his own sons. Also, rumor has it that Hyon Nam was recently in a shootout with Kim Jong Chol in one of the family's palaces.
Verdict: Wild card. Seems an unlikely selection—but so did Kim Jong Il, who had to fight his more powerful uncle and more favored half brother to become Dear Leader.

Sources: Bradley Martin's *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*; South Korean and Japanese media reports.

POLITICS

It Isn't the Message, Stupid

A new kind of guru is convincing Democrats that they don't need new ideas after all—a snazzy new sales pitch will revive their fortunes

BY JOSHUA GREEN

Soon after the November elections leading Democrats agreed that the party was ailing and in dire need of a new direction, a new focus, new ideas to lead it forward. "It's critical we realize why the electorate voted the way it did," Representative Bob Menendez, of New Jersey, the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, said of the party's devastating loss in the presidential election and its setbacks in both houses of Congress. In February, House Democratic lawmakers held a retreat in Virginia to hash out what to do next.

Something miraculous happened. They recovered—or at least they're behaving that way. Setting aside all the frank talk about the need to re-examine fundamentals, they identified an altogether different sort of affliction. The Democrats returned from Virginia not with an exit strategy for Iraq or a national-security blueprint or an economic policy but with a book—*Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, by George Lakoff, a linguist at the University of California at Berkeley. Lakoff's seductive thesis is that how you frame an idea largely determines the response to it. George Miller, a California congressman and an enthusiastic disciple, gave a copy to each member of the caucus, and the notion that "messaging" lies at the heart of the Democrats' woes has had growing currency in the party ever since.

In essence, messaging (as described by Marc Cooper in last month's *Atlantic*) is simply the process of selecting words that impart to voters whatever sentiment the author is pushing. One famous example is the Republican effort to recast the "estate tax"—with its implied application to landed aristocrats only—as the much more menacing (and less discriminating!) "death tax." Lakoff offers no new policy ideas. Instead he suggests that the Democrats reposition the ones they already have, and spruce up some unpopular terminology while they're at it. He advocates referring to "trial lawyers" as "public-protection attorneys," replacing "taxes" with "membership fees," and generally couching the entire Democratic message in palatable—even deceptive—language in order to simplify large ideas and disguise them behind innocent but powerful-sounding phrases.

Cognitive linguistics may not rate with Iraq, terrorism, and health care in surveys of voters' concerns (it doesn't rate at all, actually), but it has achieved that status among a surprising number of Democratic leaders. Lakoff has twice addressed the caucus on how to frame its policies, and his book is a surprise best seller in Washington; it has become as much a partisan totem as the lapel-pin flags worn by Republicans. Lakoff and a handful of other self-appointed gurus have raised tactical phrasing to something approaching a religion.

With "messaging efforts" under way throughout the party, more Democrats appear to be coming around to the belief that—election results be damned—what they stand for may not be the problem after all. One of the minor ridiculous figures in Washington these days is an Internet entrepreneur named Richard Yanowitch, who is pointing down another path to enlightenment. He has put together a jargony memo and a working group dedicated to "branding" the Democrats—the thought apparently being that, as if it were a flagging brand of soda, the party can be revived with snazzier packaging and a new sales pitch. And while Lakoff enjoys the sponsorship of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Yanowitch has set up shop under the auspices of her Senate counterpart, Harry Reid.

Yanowitch has established what has been described to me as a "secret mes-

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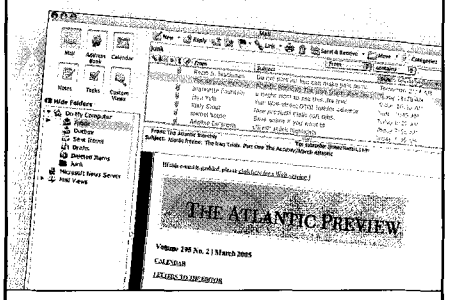

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saging group." Though he rebuffed requests for an interview, a member of this Masonic cabal leaked to me a roster of potential saviors of the Democratic Party even unlikelier than Lakoff. Along with the usual pollsters and strategists it includes the internationally best-selling mystery writer Harlan Coben, creator of the Myron Bolitar series, about the adventures of "a hotheaded, tenderhearted sports agent" (as Amazon.com describes it). Another member is R. J. Cutler, the reality-TV impresario behind last summer's Showtime series *American Candidate* (modeled after *American Idol*), which put the lie to H. L. Mencken's maxim that you can never go broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people. As the show was conceived, viewers would select a "candidate" to run for president in the serious, if alarming, hope that the winner would actually enter the race. (The show flopped. Given Cutler's political affiliation, it failed on another level, too: viewers chose a thirty-eight-year-old Republican.) The idea seems to be that people like Coben and Cutler, having moved the masses with their art, possess mysterious alchemical skills that can just as easily be applied to politics.

Strangely, the Democrats' fixation with messaging has grown so intense as to revive, in their eyes at least, the standing of an avowed foe, the Republican pollster and message-meister Frank Luntz. The wunderkind strategist who helped develop the terminology for Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America," Luntz has since drifted far from the inner circles of Republican power. Most GOP insiders question both his skills and his professional priorities, which seem to put his own celebrity above his party. But superstitious Democrats, cheered on by Lakoff, now credit Luntz's framing and wordsmithery—calling for "tax relief" rather than "tax cuts," for instance—with much of the Republicans' success over the past decade.

Not long ago, when a memo Luntz had written on how Republicans should talk about Social Security leaked to the media, there seemed to be only a single suspect (Luntz, of course), and a single—if singularly unlikely—audience for its wisdom. Most Republicans ignored the memo, but the Democrats went into paroxysms of envy. In a private meeting of officials the new party chairman, Howard Dean, vowed that he would "make George Lakoff the Democrats' Frank Luntz." That's the kind of idea that passes for visionary when you're committed to the pretense that your party isn't short of ideas.

It's not too early to examine the results of all this linguistic plotting and scheming. One of the opening salvos from the brand-aware Democratic Party was the "New Partnership for America's Future." (Heard of it? No?) The plan, outlined in a handy brochure, is a predictable rejoinder to the Contract With America—attention-getting only in its lateness. It consists of six "core values to promote a strong and secure middle class": *"Prosperity. Opportunity. Community."* To my untrained ear, many of these core values are indistinguishable from the earlier, outmoded ones recklessly put forth in the days before the linguists' role was properly understood. That is to say, they're the sort of thing you normally see plastered beneath some purposeful-looking minority student on a subway poster pitching continuing-education night classes.

Rather than defining the Democrats as a group powerfully apart from the Republicans and their alleged linguistic sorcerers, the terminology in this brochure sounds—well, it sounds like Frank Luntz might have a very good case for copyright infringement. His memo offers, with scarcely Einsteinian originality, this thought: "The best way to communicate values is to use words and phrases that no Coke-drinking, apple-pie-eating American could disagree with. *Family. Freedom. Opportunity. Responsibility. Community.*"

Of course, buzzwords are not going to rescue a failing party. That so many Democrats have achieved the Olympian state of denial necessary to believe otherwise suggests that the tempting abstractions of language and messaging have diverted them from a truth that ought to be perfectly clear: rather than being misunderstood, they were understood all too well.

Joshua Green is a senior editor of The Atlantic.

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CROSS-EXAMINATION

The Hapless Toad

Amid all the liberal hysteria about the threats posed by a conservative Supreme Court, one threat tends to be ignored—and it happens to be the biggest one

BY BENJAMIN WITTES

Liberals talk as if the world will end if President Bush gets to name some new Supreme Court justices. How much of the danger is hype, and how much of it is real?

It's mostly hype. In general liberals fear conservative judges far too much. In almost all areas, in fact, they dramatically overstate the stakes. Except, that is, in one—where the stakes are truly immense and they dramatically *understate* them.

Let me guess: abortion?

Nah. Liberals have been overselling the threat to reproductive rights for decades.

Civil rights?

No way. The foundations of modern civil-rights law are exceptionally secure. Conservative judges nibble around the edges sometimes, and people still debate the constitutionality of affirmative-action programs. But almost no one seriously argues about the basic meaning or legitimacy of core civil-rights protections.

Criminal law?

Hardly. True, the Supreme Court has curtailed the Warren era's famed revolution in criminal procedure, and it has significantly rolled back review of state-court convictions. But this war is over; the conservatives have already won. And ironically, some of the conservatives themselves are now leading the Court's aggressive rights-creation effort in criminal sentencing.

Okay, I give up. What is it?

The environment—and it's no wonder you couldn't guess. Although environmental groups sometimes raise issues in the confirmation process, environmental protection is not central to the fear-mongering of the liberal interest groups that oppose conservative judges. But the threat to basic environmental protections from conservative jurisprudence is broad-based and severe.

Give me an example.

Consider the Constitution's commerce clause, which empowers the national legislature to regulate "commerce ... among the several states." Since the New Deal the commerce clause has been construed very broadly, becoming the constitutional backbone of much important civil-rights legislation and of all the major environmental laws. Yet since 1995 the Court has issued a series of decisions that emphasize the limits of the commerce power, requiring that laws enacted under it deal in some sense with—well, interstate commerce. I have considerable sympathy for this line of argument, but its potential dangers to the environment are hard to overstate. For while the environment itself is intrinsically interstate, not all environmental-protection measures obviously constitute regulations of commerce "among the several states"—or even regulations of commerce at all. Can the government, under the Endangered Species Act, protect—as one conservative judge poetically put it—"a hapless toad that, for reasons of its own, lives its entire life in California"? Can it, under the Clean Water Act, protect isolated seasonal pools (which are not interstate) used by migratory birds (which are)?

These questions are not law-school hypotheticals. The constitutionality of protecting single-state endangered species from activity that may or may not be commercial in nature has been roiling the lower courts, splitting the most energetic conservatives from more-cautious ones. The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld protection of the hapless toad, as the Fifth Circuit did of "six species of subterranean invertebrates found only within two counties in Texas." (When a majority of the Fifth Circuit refused to rehear the latter case, a dissenting judge wrote, "For the sake of a species of 1/8-inch-long cave bugs, which lack any known value in commerce, much less interstate commerce, the panel [has] crafted a constitutionally limitless theory of federal protection. Their opinion lends new meaning to the term *reductio ad absurdum*.") The Fourth Circuit, over a ferocious dissent, upheld protections for red wolves in North Carolina. But in 2001 the Supreme Court dodged the constitutional question posed by migratory birds by finding nonconstitutional grounds to invalidate an important federal regulation that protected seasonal pools in Illinois. So where, exactly, it is headed on this issue remains murky.

You say the commerce clause is also essential to civil-rights law. Why isn't the threat to equal rights under the law just as great as the threat to hapless toads?

Theoretically, it could be. Federal protections against private-sector dis-

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crimination are all rooted in the commerce power. But they are much more firmly rooted than the environmental statutes. All employers who discriminate and all whites-only lunch counters are, after all, engaged in commerce. And the decisions upholding the civil-rights statutes have become about as sacred as cows get. Only one justice—ironically, Clarence Thomas—has articulated a vision of the commerce clause narrow enough to disrupt these precedents. It is simply unimaginable that the courts will ever again interpret the commerce power as not protecting black people. Red wolves may not prove so lucky.

Is the changing interpretation of the commerce clause the only threat to the environment?

Far from it. In recent years the Rehnquist Court has breathed life back into the notion of states' immunity from suits for money—an immunity rooted in the Eleventh Amendment. This line of cases is exceedingly controversial, and rightly so; but its practical effects have been limited in application. In a disturbing and widely overlooked 2001 opinion, however, the Fourth Circuit used an Eleventh Amendment argument to block an environmental suit that sought to force West Virginia officials to stop letting mining companies blow the tops off mountains to get at the coal inside. A reinvigorated Eleventh Amendment could prove a disaster for federal environmental laws, which because of their unique structure could be unusually vulnerable to this doctrine.

Okay, but even if the courts limit federal environmental protection, the states could step in and fill the gap, right?

Not so easily. First of all, many environmental problems are inherently interstate, and cannot reasonably be managed by any state government. Winds carry polluted air across state borders, for example; and migrating species don't check local species-protection laws before entering a state.

More significant, judicial conservatives have greatly energized the takings clause of the Fifth Amendment, which prohibits government seizure of private property without "just compensation." Traditionally, a taking has been defined as an actual expropriation of property. But the courts in recent years have made aggressive use of the concept of "regulatory taking"—that is, government action that so diminishes property values as to constitute a taking even without a formal expropriation. How far the Court will go in this direction remains unclear; there's some indication that its enthusiasm is waning. But the expanded concept of takings is already having dire consequences for environmental protection in the lower courts. Courts have found takings when the Army Corps of Engineers denied a company a permit to mine limestone in wetlands in Florida; when federal agencies imposed water-use restrictions to protect endangered smelt and salmon in California; even when the Forest Service imposed restrictions on the use of certain motorboats on a lake in Michigan. Such a broad reading of the takings doctrine effectively demands that government pay landowners to comply with the law.

Is that all?

No. The Rehnquist Court has also considerably narrowed previous doctrine concerning who has "standing" to bring a suit in the first place, insisting that a proper plaintiff have suffered an individual injury as a result of the supposedly unlawful conduct. I am sympathetic to this move as a conceptual matter. But once again, environmental laws stand to be particularly hobbled, because—rather unusually among federal statutes—they tend to provide not merely for governmental enforcement but for enforcement suits brought by citizens themselves. By tightening doctrinal requirements that limit citizen access to the courts, judges greatly reduce the legal accountability of polluters.

Is there any unifying theme here?

Yes: a libertarian suspicion of regulatory power. Environmental laws represent some of the most aggressive uses of federal power, and by their nature they limit the use of private property, sometimes quite intrusively. Thus they test the libertarian patience in more

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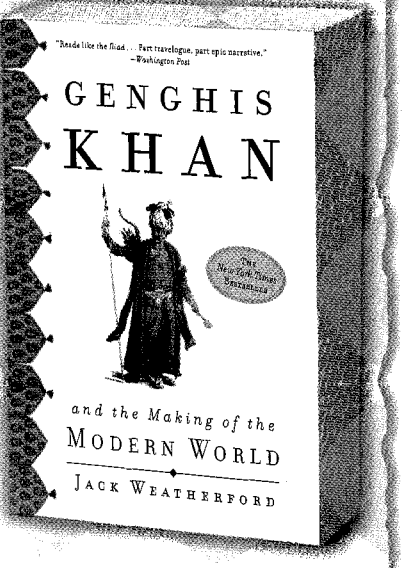

"It's hard to think of anyone else who rose from such inauspicious beginnings to something so awesome, except maybe Jesus." So writes *Harper's* in its glowing review of Jack Weatherford's radical new look at Genghis Khan, in which he argues that Khan was in fact one of history's most progressive leaders.

"Reads like the *Iliad*... Part travelogue, part epic narrative and part speculative musing... Weatherford has a good eye for detail and a fluid style."
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MATTERS OF SUBSTANCE

HOW TO BEAT A DRUG TEST

Play ball! Shaken by allegations of rampant steroid use, major-league baseball begins its season with a twist this year: more-stringent drug testing. For many Americans, of course, on-the-job drug testing has been a regular feature of the workplace since the war on drugs was launched, in the 1970s. As drug tests have become more sophisticated over the years, entrepreneurs have developed increasingly inventive ways of beating them. Heads up, slugger: here are some of the products currently on the market. (*The Atlantic* makes no claims as to their efficacy.) —MARSHALL POE

Total Eclipse
This is a carbohydrate-rich drink that is supposed to flush suspicious compounds out of urine. The instructions say to drink the entire sixteen-ounce bottle of Eclipse *at least an hour before the test, then to* drink "as much water as possible" and "urinate frequently." Cost: $22.95.

Warp Speed
For "individuals with extreme toxin levels and/or extreme body size," the makers of Total Eclipse offer this thirty-two-ounce drink, which works in thirty *minutes*. Cost: $39.95.

The Randomizer
The Randomizer is a urine additive, intended to beat surprise drug tests. "Just pour contents of the vial in your specimen cup and then add urine to sample. All Toxins will be eliminated in about 5 seconds ..." Cost: $24.95.

The BioWash
The BioWash is an "herbal cleansing shampoo" to be used in preparation for hair-follicle drug tests. The company says that the "warm tingling sensation" will tell you it's working. Cost: $49.95.

The afterBurner
The makers of this drug-cleansing treatment advertise that their product will both help you pass drug tests and make you look better: "Alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, cocaine, opiates, methamphetamines, heroin, benzodiazepines" can "cause major damage to the structure and texture of the hair"; the afterBurner restores hair "to its natural state" and makes it "cleaner, healthier, shinier." Cost: $129.99.

THC Maxout
"If you have a drug test coming up that you just cannot afford to fail, if you have children and house payments, and your livelihood depends on it," you need THC Maxout, say the manufacturers. The treatment regimen is not easy: it requires drinking four glasses of "Maxout liquid" and taking 200 "pre-cleanse" pills (washed down with 20 twelve-ounce glasses of juice) over the course of two days. Cost: $69.95.

Fizzy Flush Mouth Solution
What if your employer wants to test your saliva? Drop one of these easy-to-hide tablets into a glass of water, rinse, swallow, and repeat. The manufacturer advises you not to "smoke" between the time you finish the rinse cycle and the test. Cost: $30.00 for two tablets.

The Urinator
The Urinator consists of a short tube attached to a battery-heated plastic bag. Fill the bag with "clean" urine, warm the liquid to body temperature, stuff the bag in your pants, and you're ready to take the test—although the manufacturers advise that their product is not for beating drug tests but for "genetic privacy." Cost: $149.95.

The Whizzinator
The Whizzinator takes the Urinator one step further by replacing the tube with "a very realistic prosthetic penis" so that men can pass *observed* tests. To match skin color, the penises come in five natural shades. Though its makers claim the Whizzinator is foolproof, the actor Tom Sizemore was caught using *one during a drug test in February.* Cost: $150.00.

ways than many other types of regulations—and genuinely push up against the limitations on governmental power outlined in the Constitution. Tighten those limitations (even a little), as conservatives tend to do, and the dominoes of environmental law quickly begin tumbling.

Some conservatives have become sensitive to this problem in recent years. In fact, several of the most important recent pro-environment opinions—including the Fourth Circuit's decision affirming protection for the red wolf—were issued by conservative judicial luminaries. The battle over environmental law is as much a fight within conservatism as it is between conservative and liberal judicial minds.

But at least a portion of the judicial right also harbors a strain of simple hostility to environmental values. Dissenting in a 1997 Endangered Species Act case, Judge David Sentelle, of the D.C. Circuit, wrote,

> This case concerns the efforts of San Bernardino County, California ... to construct a hospital and supporting infrastructure for its citizens and other humans. Unfortunately, those efforts discomfit an insect—the Delhi Sands Flower-Loving Fly. According to the parties in this case, there are fewer than 300 breeding individuals of this species, all located within forty square miles in southern California.

The law, he sneered, would "prevent counties and their citizens from building hospitals or from driving to those hospitals by routes in which the bugs smashed upon their windshields might turn out to include the Delhi Sands Flower-Loving Fly or some other species of rare insect." Remember Judge Sentelle's contempt as the judicial-nomination wars heat up again this year. Because more than the fate of abortion rights or civil rights or criminal justice, what hangs in the balance in the future composition of the Supreme Court is the fate not only of the Flower-Loving Fly but of the red wolf, the hapless toad, the West Virginia mountains—and the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Benjamin Wittes is an editorial writer at The Washington Post.

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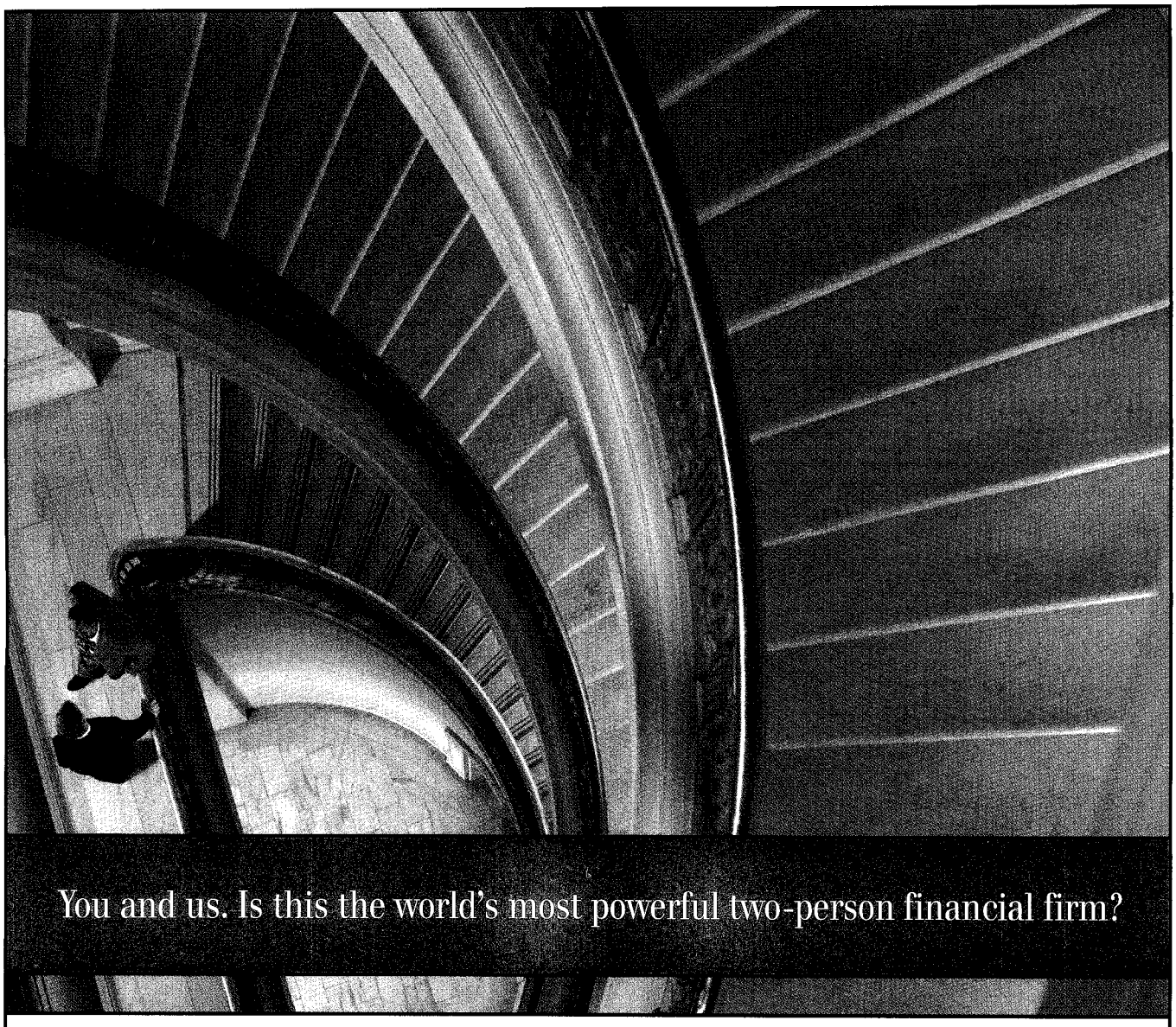

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Primary Sources

Why you shouldn't trust your real-estate agent; the financial cost of expelling gays from the military; how to spot a crooked CEO

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Priced to Sell

Should you listen when a real-estate agent advises you to take that initial offer on the home you're trying to sell? Probably not. According to a study by two University of Chicago economists, agents systematically urge their clients to accept initial offers quickly, when they should probably be holding out for a higher price. Because their commission amounts to a relatively small proportion of any given sale, the study points out, real-estate agents have little incentive to wait for a marginally higher price—especially since that extra time could be used to sell other houses. Sellers, in contrast, want to get the best possible price, because they reap the greatest part of the profit. Tellingly, the researchers found that when agents sell their own houses, they leave them on the market about 9.5 days longer than similar houses they sell for clients, and get 3.7 percent more for them.

—"Market Distortions When Agents Are Better Informed: The Value of Information in Real Estate Transactions," Steven D. Levitt and Chad Syverson, NBER

Spoil the CEO ...

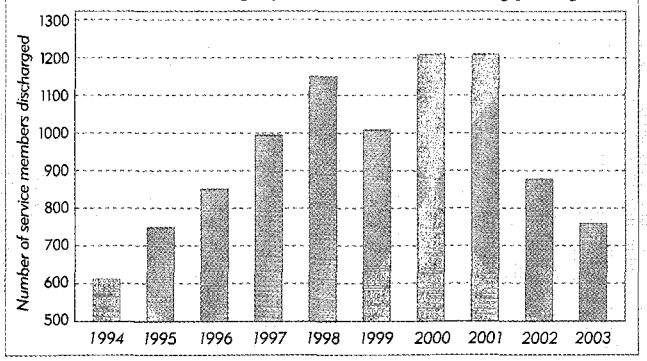
Corporate scandals often happen at the most successful firms—or at least at firms where the appearance of success breeds a megalomaniac CEO, reams of stock options, overoptimistic goals, and gaga recommendations from Wall Street equity analysts. This is the conclusion of a Boston Consulting Group study that analyzes the companies responsible for twenty-five of the largest corporate frauds since 1996. Compared with their clean competitors, "fraud firms" offered their CEOs eight times as much stock-based pay and set corporate performance targets 250 percent higher. Other factors associated with executive malfeasance were inflated stock prices and attention from the press (before their downfalls, fraud-firm CEOs were three times as likely to be quoted in the media as their competitors). Moreover, two interesting insights emerged. First, good corporate governance—of the sort mandated by post-bubble regulations—may have done little to prevent fraud. Enron's board, for instance, was rated among the nation's five best-governed in 2000. Second, while crooked execs may have fooled analysts, the media, and the public, the market sniffed them out. The median fraud firm lost 40 percent of its value in the year before its actions came to light. (One wonders who was selling ...)

—"Corporate Governance Revisited: How Greed and Ego Can Destroy Companies and the Lessons to Be Learned," Kees Cools, Boston Consulting Group

THE NATION

OUSTING THE OUTED

Service members discharged for homosexual conduct, by fiscal year



Don't Ask, Don't Tell

It's debatable whether kicking homosexuals out of the military is good for unit cohesion and morale, as the policy's defenders claim—but there's no question that it's bad for the military budget, and probably for military readiness as well. According to a report from the GAO, the Department of Defense may have had to spend as much as $95 million to recruit and train replacements for the 9,488 service members discharged for coming out in various ways since "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" took effect, in 1994. In addition, 757 of those discharged were in "critical occupations"—many of them intelligence-related jobs such as "voice interceptor" and "interpreter/translator." (The report found that 322 of those discharged could claim knowledge of important foreign languages such as Arabic, Farsi, and Korean.) These costs may help explain why the military seems to have scaled back such discharges since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan. The Pentagon recently announced that only 653 gay service members were discharged in 2004, down from around 1,200 a year in 2000 and 2001.

—"Financial Costs and Loss of Critical Skills Due to DOD's Homosexual Conduct Policy Cannot Be Completely Estimated," GAO

SOCIETY

Racial Profiling Writ Large

What makes for a "bad neighborhood"? In most people's minds it's broken windows, graffiti, abandoned cars, and other signs of decay—and, according to a new study, the mere presence of minorities. A team of researchers studying different neighborhoods of Chicago found that people were much more likely to deem a neighborhood disorderly if it was heavily black or Latino—regardless of objective signs of disorder such as broken windows. This bias was exhibited even by minorities: Latinos, for instance, were more likely than whites to associate disorder with the presence of black residents in a neighborhood, and black participants in the study were just as likely as whites to associate a higher percentage of black residents with a higher degree of decay. This suggests that not just overt racism but society-wide cultural stereotypes are at work.

—"Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of 'Broken Windows,'" Robert J. Sampson and Stephen W. Raudenbush, *Social Psychology Quarterly*

Compiled by Ross Douthat, Nathan Littlefield, and Marshall Poe. For links to the reports and documents discussed in these pages visit www.theatlantic.com/doc/200505/primarysources

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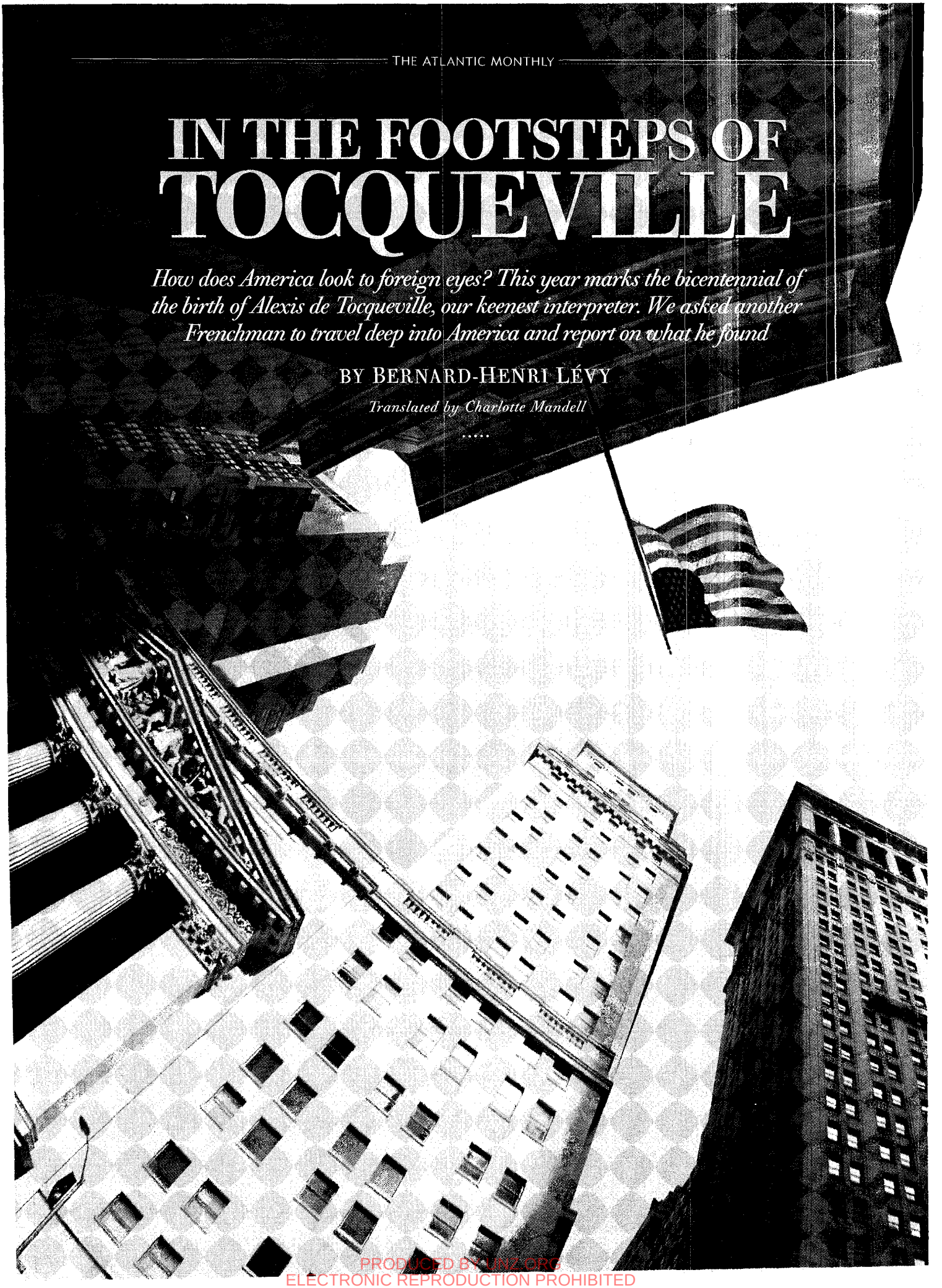
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF TOCQUEVILLE

How does America look to foreign eyes? This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Alexis de Tocqueville, our keenest interpreter. We asked another Frenchman to travel deep into America and report on what he found

BY BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY

Translated by Charlotte Mandell



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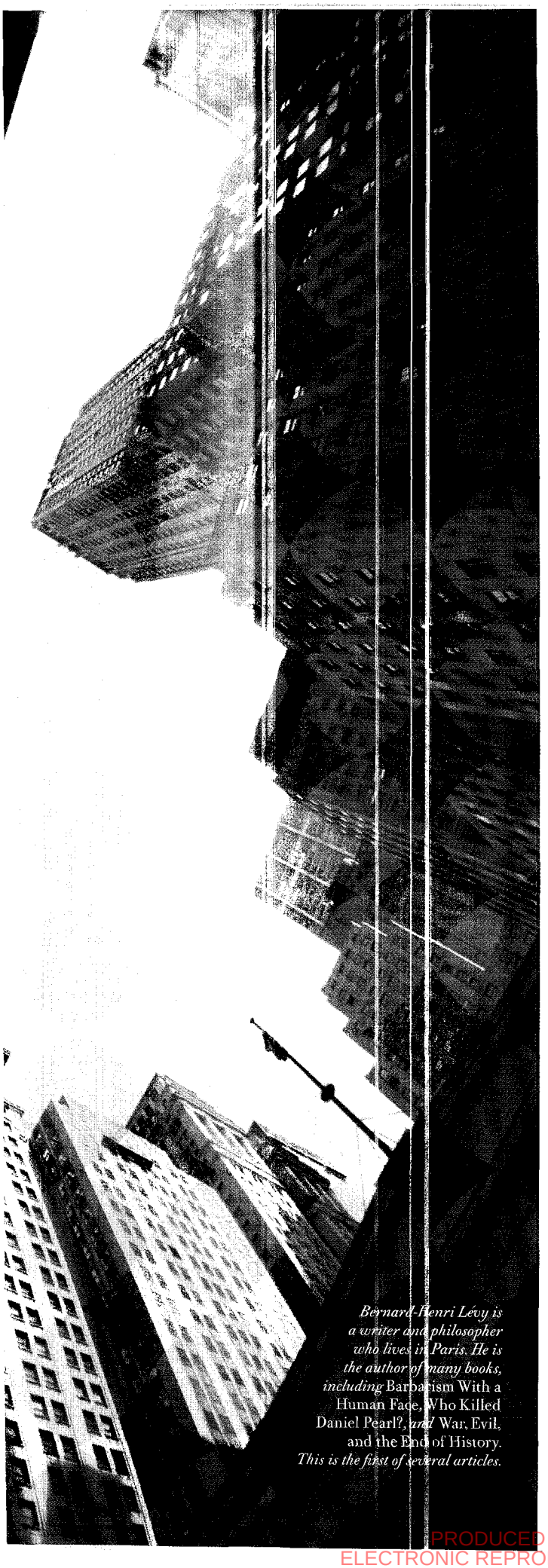

Bernard-Henri Lévy is a writer and philosopher who lives in Paris. He is the author of many books, including Barbarism With a Human Face, Who Killed Daniel Pearl?, *and* War, Evil, and the End of History. *This is the first of several articles.*

A People and Its Flag

It was here, a little south of Boston, on this East Coast that still bears the mark of Europe so clearly, that Alexis de Tocqueville came ashore: Newport, Rhode Island. Its well-kept Easton's Beach. Its yachts. Its Palladian mansions and painted wooden houses that remind me of the beach towns of Normandy. A naval museum. An athenaeum library. Bed-and-breakfasts with a picture of the owner displayed instead of a sign. Gorgeous trees. Tennis courts. A Georgian-style synagogue, exhibited as the oldest in the United States, but which, with its well-polished pale wood, its fluted columns, its spotless black rattan chairs, its large candelabra, its plaque engraved with clear-cut letters in memory of Isaac Touro and the six or seven great spiritual leaders who succeeded him, its American flag standing next to the Torah scroll under glass, seems to me, on the contrary, strangely modern.

And then, of course, the flags—a riot of American flags, at crossroads, on building fronts, on car hoods, on pay phones, on the furniture displayed in the windows along Thames Street, on the boats tied to the dock and on the moorings with no boats, on beach umbrellas, on parasols, on bicycle saddlebags—everywhere, in every form, flapping in the wind or on stickers, an epidemic of flags that has spread throughout the city. There are also, as it happens, a lot of Japanese flags. A Japanese cultural festival is opening, with exhibitions of prints, sushi samples on the boardwalk, sumo wrestling in the street, barkers enticing passersby to come look at these wonders, these monsters: "Come on! Look at them—all white and powdered! Three hundred pounds! Legs like hams! So fat they can't even walk! They needed three seats in the airplane! Step right up!" White flags with a red ball, symbol of the Land of the Rising Sun, hang from the balconies on this street of jewelers near the harbor, where I'm searching for a restaurant to have lunch in.

In the end, though, it's the American flag that dominates. One is struck by the omnipresence of the Star-Spangled Banner, even on the T-shirts of the kids who come to watch the sumo wrestlers as the little crowd cheers them on. It's the flag of the American cavalry in westerns. It's the flag of Frank Capra movies. It's the fetish that is there, in the frame, every time the American president appears. It's the beloved flag, almost a living being, the use of which I understand is subject to rules—not just rules but an extremely precise code of flag behavior: Don't get it dirty, don't copy it, don't tattoo it onto your body, never let it fall on the ground, never hang it upside-down, don't insult it, don't burn it. On the other hand, if it gets too old, if it can no longer be used, if it can't be flown, then you *must* burn it. Instead of throwing it out or bundling it up, it's better to burn it than abandon it in the trash. It's the flag that was offended by Kid Rock at the Super Bowl, and it's the flag of Michael W. Smith in his song "There She Stands," written just after September 11, in which "she" is none other than "it," the flag, the American

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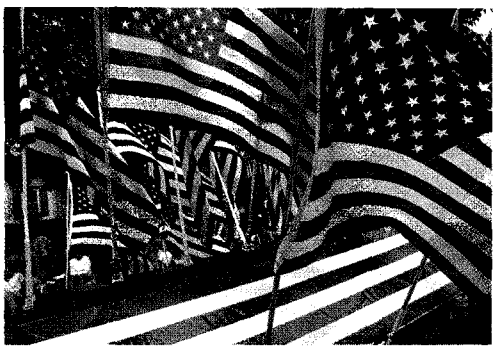
symbol that was targeted, defiled, attacked, scorned by the barbarians, but is always proudly unfurled.

It's a little strange, this obsession with the flag. It's incomprehensible for someone who, like me, comes from a country without a flag—where the flag has, so to speak, disappeared, where you see it flying only in front of official buildings, and where any nostalgia and concern for it, any evocation of it, is a sign of an attachment to the past that has become almost ridiculous. Is this flag obsession a result of September 11? A response to that trauma whose violence we Europeans persist in underestimating but which, three years later, haunts American minds as much as ever? Should we re-read those pages in Tocqueville on the good fortune of being sheltered by geography from violations of the nation's territorial space, and come to see in this return to the flag a neurotic abreaction to the astonishment that the violation actually occurred? Or is it something else entirely? An older, more conflicted relationship of America with itself and with its national existence? A difficulty in being a nation, more severe than in the flagless countries of old Europe, that produces this compensatory effect?



It's a little strange, this obsession with the flag. It's incomprehensible for someone who comes from a country where the flag has, so to speak, disappeared, where any nostalgia and concern for it is a sign of an attachment to the past that has become almost ridiculous.

Leafed through the first few pages of *One Nation, After All*, which the author, the sociologist Alan Wolfe, gave me last night. Maybe the secret lies in this "after all." Maybe American patriotism is more complex, more painful, than it seems at first glance, and perhaps its apparent excessiveness comes from that. Or perhaps it has to do, as Tocqueville saw it, with a kind of "reflective patriotism" that, unlike the "instinctive love" that reigned during the regimes of times past, is forced to exaggerate when it comes to emblems and symbols. To be continued ...

But it's a good question to ask oneself, in any case, at the beginning of this journey that will lead me for almost a year from large cities to small towns, on highways and back roads, from one end to the other of this country I really know so little. Lord knows I've come here time and again in the past. Of course I have always loved it, and been molded, from boyhood on, by its literature, its movies, its culture. Anti-Americanism, that strange passion that acts, in my country, like a giant magnet attracting all the most disagreeable qualities that national ideology can produce, has had no adversaries more resolute than I. But there it is. A few flags in the windows, a slight whiff of patriotic celebration—and suddenly I have the feeling I'm approaching terra incognita.

TELL ME WHAT YOUR PRISONS ARE ...

Tocqueville's first intention was, we tend to forget, to investigate the American penal system. He went beyond that, of course. He analyzed the political system and American society in its entirety better than anyone. But as his notes, his journal, his letters to Kergorlay and others, and the very text of *Democracy in America* attest, it was with this business of prisons that everything began, and that's why I, too, after Newport, asked to see the terrible and mysterious New York prison Rikers Island, that city within a city, an island that is not shown on every map and of whose existence few New Yorkers take much notice.

A meeting with Mark J. Cranston, of the New York City Department of Corrections, this Tuesday morning at 5:00 A.M., in Queens, at the entrance to a bridge that officially doesn't go anywhere open to the public, so it doesn't really have a name. Landscape of desolate shoreline in the foggy morning light. Electric barbed-wire fences. High walls. A checkpoint, as at the edge of a war zone, where the prison guards, almost all of them black, greet one another as they come on duty; and—heading in the opposite direction, packed into barred buses that look like school buses—the prisoners, also mainly black, or Hispanic, who are being driven with chains on their feet to courthouses in the Bronx and Queens. A security badge along with my photo. Frisked. On the other side of the East River, in the fog, a white boat, like a ghost ship, where, for lack of space, the least dangerous criminals are locked up. And very soon, clinging to New York (La Guardia is so close that there are times, when the wind blows from a certain quarter, that the noise from the planes makes you raise your voice, or even stop talking), the ten prison buildings that make up this fortress, this enclave cut off from everything, this anti-utopian reservation.

The common room, dirty gray, where the people arrested during the night are assembled, seated on makeshift benches. A small cell, No. 14, where two prisoners (white—is that by chance?) have been isolated. A neater dormitory, with clean sheets, where a sign indicates, as in Manhattan taverns, that the zone is "smoke-free." A man, weirdly agitated, who, tak-

PAGES 54–55: HIROOKI AOKI / PHOTONICA; ABOVE: JOSEPH DE SCIOSE / AURORA

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ing me for a health inspector, hurries toward me to complain about the mosquitoes. And before we arrive at the detention center proper, before the row of cells, all identical, like minuscule horse stalls, a labyrinth of corridors sliced with bars and opening onto a series of "social" areas they persist in showing me: a chapel; a mosque; a volleyball court from which a distant birdsong rises; a library where everyone can, they say, come to consult the law manuals; another room, finally, where there are three open boxes of letters marked "Grievance," "Legal Aid," and "Social Services." At first sight you'd think it was a dilapidated hospital, but one obsessed with hygiene: the enormous black female guard, her belt studded with keys, who is guiding me through this maze explains that the first thing to do when a delinquent arrives is to have him take a shower in order to disinfect him. Later on she tells me—in the nice booming voice of a guard who has wound up, since there's no other choice, liking these prisoners—that the second thing to do is to give them psychological tests to identify the suicidal temperaments. Prisoners call to her as we pass, insult her because they've been denied the use of the recreation room or the canteen, make farting noises at which she doesn't bat an eye, stop her sometimes to confide a wish to live or die. It's only when you look at them up close, obviously, that things become more complicated ...

This man with shackled feet. This other one, handcuffs on his wrists and gloves over the handcuffs, because just last week he hid eight razor blades in his ass before throwing himself on a guard to cut his throat. These wild-animal looks, hard to endure. These prisoners for whom a secure system of serving hatches had to be invented, because they took advantage of the moment when their scrap of food was slid over to them to bite the guard's hand. The little Hispanic man, hand on his ear, streaming blood, screaming that he should be taken to the infirmary, under the shouts of his black co-detainees—the guard tells me he has a "Rikers cut," a ritual gash made to the ear or face of an inmate by the big shots of the Latin Kings and the Bloods, the gangs that control the prison. The shouts, the "fuck you"s, the enraged banging on the metal doors in the maximum-security section. Farther on, at the end of the section, in one of the three "shower cells," which open onto the corridor, the spectacle of a bearded, naked giant jerking off in front of an impassive female guard, to whom he shouts in the voice of a madman, "Come and get me, bitch! Come on!" And then the cry of alarm my guard lets out when, dying of thirst, I bend toward a sink in the hallway: "No! Not there! Don't drink there!" Seeing my surprise, she regains her composure. Excuses herself. Stammers out that it's all right, it's just the prisoners' sink, I could have drunk there. But her reflex says a lot about sanitary conditions in the jail. Rikers Island is actually a "jail," not a "prison." It accepts either those who have been charged and await sentencing or those sentenced to less than a year. What would this be like if it were a real prison? How would these people be treated if they were hardened criminals?

On the way back with Mark Cranston, taking the bridge that leads to the normal world, and noticing what I hadn't noticed when I arrived—namely, that from where I am and, very probably, from the volleyball court and the exercise yard and even certain cells, you can see, as if you were touching it, the Manhattan skyline—I can't dodge this question: Does the impression of having brushed with hell arise because Rikers is cut off, or because it is so close to everything? And then another question, which occurs to me when Cranston, anxious about the impression his "house" has made, explains that the island used to be a huge garbage dump where the city's trash was unloaded: Prison or dumping ground, then? A kind of replacement, on the same site, of society's trash by its rejects? First impressions of the system. First briefing.

On Religion in General, and Baseball in Particular

Leaving the city. Yes, leaving New York, which I know too well, fast, and through a driving rain, we are on the way to Cooperstown, that miniature village in the central part of the state, which has managed at least three times to be in the heart of high-tension zones in American history. It was the town of James Fenimore Cooper, and thus of the symbolic responsibility for the slaughter of the Indians. It lies in a region where, before the Civil War, fleeing slaves and their smugglers passed through. And last but not least, since this is the claim to fame to which it seems most attached, it is the world capital of baseball.

I spend the night in a wooden chalet that has been transformed into a bed-and-breakfast, with ceramic rabbits in the garden and a magazine in the bedroom that explains how "to live comfortably at thirty," how to be "older than seventy and still be in love," and "six ways to get your daily glass of milk." The house is run by two commanding women, mother and daughter, who wear identical blood-red canvas aprons and look the spitting image of Margaret Thatcher at two stages of her life. I spend time in the morning listening to these ladies tell me the history of their house. The building was actually created a century ago by an officer in the Civil War, but it has been renovated so as to hide all antique traces. I am interested in the "bed-and-breakfast business," which is the passion of their existence: "Is this your first experience? Did you like it? I'm glad you did, since there are as many bed-and-breakfasts as there are owners. Everyone puts their mark on it—it's an art, a religion. No, that's not the word, 'religion'; we don't make any difference here between religions—no more than we would with the Yankees and the Red Sox. Which one actually won, by the way?" (She has turned toward a customer in shorts and undershirt, who is sitting at the table next to mine and shrugs as he wolfs down a huge slab of bacon.) "See, he doesn't know. That means it doesn't count. And you—what are you? Oh! Jewish. Oh! Atheist. That's okay ... Everyone does what they want ... In this business you have to like ninety-nine percent of your clients ..."

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In short, the breakfast was a little long. But now I'm in the immense museum, completely disproportionate to the dollhouses in the rest of the town. Here this great national sport is honored, this sport that establishes people's identities, becomes part of their imaginative world—almost the American civic and patriotic religion, this baseball. Isn't there, in the Hall of Fame adjoining the museum, a plaque devoted to those champions who interrupted their careers to serve in American wars?

This is not a museum, it's a church. These are not rooms, they're chapels. The visitors themselves aren't really visitors but devotees, meditative and fervent. I hear one of them asking, in a low voice, if it's true that the greatest champions are buried here—beneath our feet, as if we were at Westminster Abbey, or in the Imperial Crypt beneath the Kapuziner Church in Vienna. And every effort is made to sanctify Cooperstown itself, this cradle of the national religion, this new Nazareth, this simple little town that nothing prepared for its election and yet which was present at the birth of the thing. An edifying history, told in the exhibition rooms and the brochures, of the scientific commission created at the beginning of the twentieth century by a former baseball player who became a millionaire and launched a nationwide contest on the theme "Send us your oldest baseball memory." He collected the testimony of an old engineer from Denver who in 1839, in Cooperstown, in front of the tailor's shop, saw Abner Doubleday, later a Northern general and a Civil War hero, the man who would fire the first shot against the Southerners, explain the game to passersby, set down the rules, and, in fact, baptize it.

It was in honor of this story that the year 1939, exactly a century later, was chosen for the inauguration of the museum. In a well-known article in *Natural History*, the paleontologist and baseball fan Stephen Jay Gould recalled that a long-ago exhibit at the museum noted that "in the hearts of those who love baseball" the Yankee general remains "the lad in the pasture where the game was invented." It's because of this story that the big stadium nearby—where, they say, some of the finest games in the country are played—is called Doubleday Field and bears on its front the fine, proud inscription BIRTHPLACE OF BASEBALL. And what can one say, finally, of the commissioner of baseball, Bud Selig, who at Arlington a few years ago to place a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, publicly remembered Abner Doubleday, that son of Cooperstown, also buried in the National Cemetery, officially proclaiming him on that day, before the eyes of America and the world, the pope of the national religion? That day it was not just the town but the entire United States that joined in a celebration that had the twofold merit of associating the most popular sport in the country with the traditional rural values that Fenimore Cooper's town embodies, and also with the patriotic grandeur that the name Doubleday bears.

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The only problem, Tim Wiles, the museum's director of research, tells me, is that Abner Doubleday, in that famous year of 1839, wasn't in Cooperstown but at West Point; that the old engineer, who was supposed to have played that first game with him, had been just five years old; that the word "baseball" had already appeared in 1815, in a novel by Jane Austen, and in 1748, in a private letter found in England; that a baseball scholar, an eminent member of the Society for American Baseball Research, had just discovered, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, an even older trace; that the Egyptians had, it seems, their own form of the game. The only problem, he says, is that we have always known—since 1939, in fact, since the museum's opening—that baseball is a sport of the people, and even if, like all sports of the people, it suffers from a lack of written archives, its origin is age-old. The only problem is that this history is a myth, and every year millions of men and women come, like me, to visit a town devoted entirely to its celebration.

THE FALSE AS WILL AND REPRESENTATION

Two hypotheses to work from. Either the visitors in question are ignoramuses who believe, in good faith, that it's all true; or, on the contrary, they are in the know. They know that the story doesn't hold true, but the subject excites them so much that they keep informed about the discoveries of the thousands of baseball scholars who form one of the most curious, but also one of the most serious, learned societies in this country. They are all in full agreement about the falsity of the legend; they celebrate a myth, not believing for an instant that it's true.

Here, then, is a new scene, which makes me lean toward the second hypothesis. We're still in Cooperstown, but now we're in the Farmers' Museum, which owns many artifacts and exhibits the crafts and traditions of rural American life. But you can't escape the simulation. These brand-new nineteenth-century costumes. This canoe that smells of green wood, from which a copy of an Indian knife is dangling. A tomahawk with its wooden handle freshly cut. A cardboard cow, warranted to be a faithful reproduction of the cows of that era. Dr. Jackson's office, his instrument case, his water pitcher, his stethoscope, his washbasin. The garden where the herbalist would have cultivated plants at the time had to be reinvented. A cemetery whose gravestones are real but where no corpses are buried. Finally women who, in their caps, their big aprons, their unbleached cotton dresses, act like real farmers running actual businesses, whereas here again, everything is false. What do you do for a living? I'm a nineteenth-century weaver at the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown (or an herbalist, or a baker). Every day I put on my costume and go play my role. I'm sure the museum has more relics, more actual objects from the era, more vestiges. But there is a taste for facsimile. They wanted the

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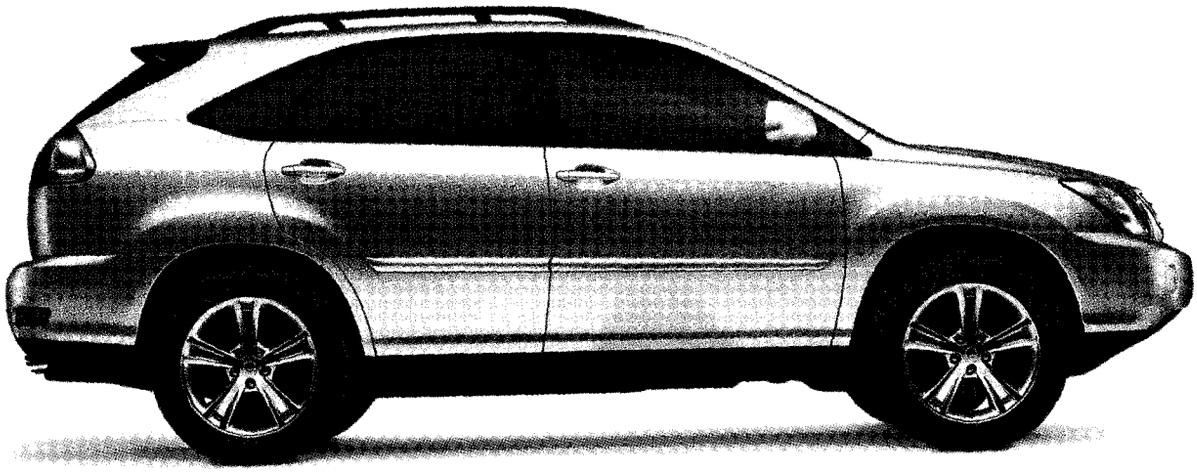

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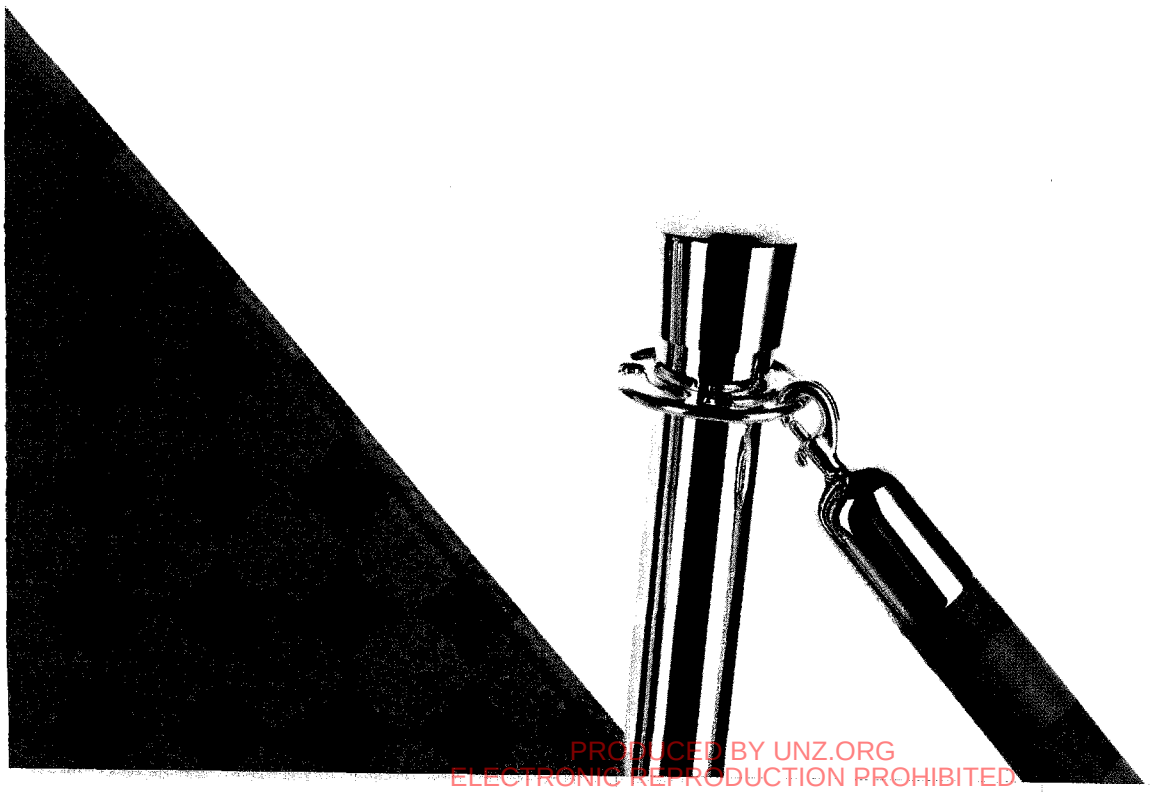

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new to simulate the old. The whole idea is not to preserve but to reconstitute a false truth and celebrate it as such. Defeat of the archive. Triumph of kitsch.

And then here's another case, even more extravagant. Far off, right in the middle of the reconstituted village, there is a tent where a crowd larger than the one in front of Dr. Jackson's office or the herbalist's garden is gathered. As we come near it, we see beneath the tent an empty zone surrounded by thick braided ropes, the kind used in museums. And in the middle a gypsum statue, just over ten feet long, lying down, its ribs jutting out, one hand on its stomach, as if mummified. They call it the Cardiff Giant, and its history goes like this:

The scene is Cardiff, New York, in 1869. Workmen digging a well on a farm belonging to William C. "Stub" Newell unearth this mummified giant. Word spreads to Syracuse. Much discussion in the county about whether it's a fossil or a work of art. A consortium is created, which, leaning toward the fossil thesis and thinking it's the remains of a prehistoric man, exhibits the discovery, first in a tent on Newell's farm, then throughout the state, transporting it from town to town. Except there's a catch. The object has a strange look to it. Certain details—the toes, the penis—are too well preserved. Some witnesses, moreover, begin to gossip that they saw a wagon transporting a block of gypsum to a marble sculptor's place in Chicago, and then others saw the same wagon arrive here, loaded with a large wooden crate. So the idea is first insinuated, then asserted, that the whole business is a fake—that the pores of the skin, for instance, were made by pounding the gypsum with a piece of wood studded with nails, and that Newell's friend George Hull, a cigar manufacturer from Binghamton, New York, buried this false mummy on Newell's farm.

But now how does the world react? The hoax giant is still exhibited, as if nothing had happened. P. T. Barnum, the great showman, tries to buy it and, furious at being refused, has a copy made, which he exhibits in New York City. During this time the original false giant goes to the Pan American Exhibition. It is bought in the early 1930s by a rich publisher from Iowa. Then, in 1939, by the New York State Historical Association. Finally, in 1948, it's transported here to Cooperstown, where it has been on display ever since, after its truly national funeral. So today people come from all over the United States to admire the biggest, most famous, most official example of the fake.

To revere a counterfeit as if it were real. To prefer in a museum, even when one has a choice, recent artifacts over relics. To rewrite the history of an age-old pastime as if it were a national sport. What is at stake in each case is a relationship to time, and in particular to the past—as if, with this nation so eminently oriented toward its present and, especially, its future, regret for the past occurs only on condition that the past can be reappropriated with well-calculated words and deeds. As if with all one's strength—including the strength and power of myth and forgery—one had to reassert the power of the present over the past. Or the opposite, which comes down to the same thing: as if the pain was having not enough past rather than too much. So people fall back on the theme of "Since we weren't there for the child's baptism, let's at least be there when the man's last words are spoken." The self-generation of a culture that wants to be descended from its own handiwork and, accordingly, rewrites its great and small genealogies. An American neurosis?

The Baseball Hall of Fame is not a museum, it's a church. These aren't really visitors but devotees. I hear one of them asking, in a low voice, if it's true that the greatest champions are buried here—beneath our feet, as if we were at Westminster Abbey.

THEY SHOOT CITIES, DON'T THEY?

That a city could die: for a European, that is unthinkable. And yet ...

Buffalo, a city that was once the glory of America, its showcase, where two presidents once lived (and where one was shot and another inaugurated), a city that on this late-July afternoon—the anniversary, by the way, of Tocqueville's visit, in 1831—offers a landscape of desolation: long avenues without cars, stretching out to infinity; not one good restaurant to dine in; few hotels; fake gardens in place of buildings; deserted lots in place of gardens; trees that are dead or diseased; boarded-up office buildings, disintegrating or about to be torn down. Yes, a city where you can still find some of the finest specimens of urban architecture in America and some of the earliest skyscrapers, is now reduced to destroying them, because an unoccupied building is a building that is breaking apart and, one day or another, will fall on your head. The library is on the verge of financial collapse. There are streets that seem not to have any running water or mail delivery. Even the main train station, which during the era of

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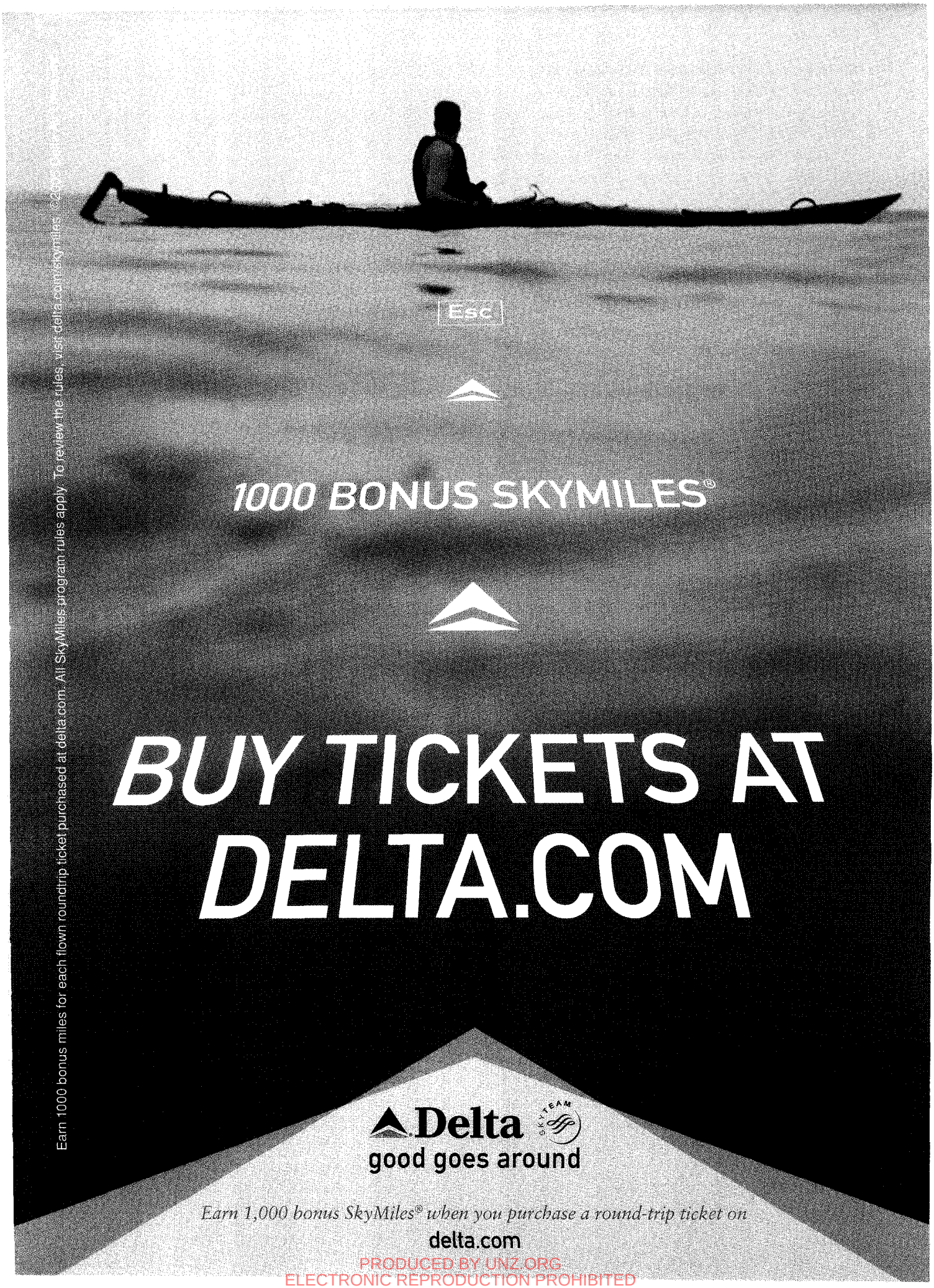

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the steelworks was a major hub, is now only a shell, an enormous abandoned sugarloaf, with rusted metal signs, wind howling, crows flying around it, and, in big letters, THE NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD, already half effaced.

Lackawanna, about ten miles south of Buffalo. The worst thing here is the factory. It was once a modern enterprise, and the region's heart. All that's left is cone-shaped mounds of coal or iron, in lots overgrown with weeds. Extinguished chimneys. Blackened, unmoving freight cars. Warehouses with broken windows. And inside one of the warehouses, which I sneak into: sagging armchairs; shelves of twisted metal where some files have been left; yellowed photographs of beaming employees, confident of the eternal greatness of their factory; crumpled copies of *The Buffalo News*; charred plastic gas masks; on one wall an assembly of manometers, barometers, steam gauges, thermometers eaten away by humidity; clocks—I count four—all stopped at the same hour, within a few minutes. If I didn't know the history of Bethlehem Steel; if I didn't know that they closed this factory twenty years ago because of tragic but commonplace foreign competition; if I didn't know that the city itself still lives, with a tiny life indeed, but a life all the same; if I hadn't, for instance, read the story of those six Arab-Americans who hid here after September 11, the ones the FBI arrested, I could almost believe in a natural catastrophe, a cataclysm—of the kind that leaves standing the calcified façades of those towns that had to be evacuated with no time to carry anything away, because of an earthquake, a tsunami, a volcano.

Cleveland. Not so sad. Not so broken. A real will, above all, to revitalize the destroyed neighborhoods. At a meeting in a church at breakfast time, with Mort Mandell and Neighborhood Progress Inc., a dozen or so men (mostly) of means, with their slightly old-fashioned pearl-gray suits, white hair, and fine austere faces, successors to the Gunds, the Van Sweringens, the Jacobs—those Protestant or Jewish philanthropists who flourished with the greatness of the city—are gathered. With slides and diagrams at hand, they're thinking about how to rehabilitate the heart of this city that, even if they have deserted it, even if they went elsewhere to make their fortunes or their lives, remains their "little homeland."

Here, too, deserted neighborhoods. Empty parking lots. Cars prowling along Euclid or Prospect, between Fifth and Sixth East. Winos in municipal buildings. Empty churches, or all bricked up, yet I keep being told about the renewal in America of evangelical faith and morality. A fire station with the sign BUDGET CUTS ARE SUICIDE. A rotary planted with flowers that women feel sorry for and water, since no one goes there anymore. And this detail, which didn't strike me in Buffalo: the absence of public signs on certain avenues. But on the wall of a building whose next-door building has been razed, an inscription, in capital letters from the last century, reappearing the way wreckage washes up: ATTORNEY AT LAW; and farther on, in a vacant lot, on the last remaining wall of a vanished building, a sign from another time, preposterous witness to a previous life: THE HOTTEST JEANS ON TWO LEGS.

And finally Detroit, sublime Detroit, the city that during the war, because of its car and steel factories, vaunted itself as "the arsenal of democracy," and that once one has entered it—whether in the Brush Park area, north of downtown, or, worse, East Detroit—seems like an immense, deserted Babylon, a futuristic city whose inhabitants have fled: more burned or razed houses; collapsed façades and roofs that the next big rain will carry away; trash heaps in former gardens; prowlers; Dumpster divers; nature reasserting its rights; foxes, some nights; crack houses; closed schools; a liquor store ringed with barbed wire. The Fox Theatre intact, with its winged golden lions at the entrance; intact, too, the Wright houses and Orchestra Hall, where people go in tuxedos to a doomsday environment. But the Book Cadillac Hotel and the Statler-Hilton, those architectural wonders whose corbelled construction is museum-quality—they are empty, and padlocked. At times you'd think it was a plague; at other times Dresden or Sarajevo. An observer who knew nothing of the history of the city and the riots that forty years ago accelerated the exodus of the white population to the suburbs might think now that he was in a bombed metropolis. But no; it's just Detroit. It's just an American city whose inhabitants have left, forgetting to close the door behind them. It's just this experience, unique in the world, of a city that people have left as one leaves a spurned partner, and that little by little has returned to chaos.

The mystery of these modern ruins. Enigma of an America about which I discover that a certain old feeling (essential to Europe's civility, consubstantial with Europe's urbanity) is perhaps foreign to it: a love of cities.

THE REVENGE OF THE LITTLE MAN

He can't manage to say "stem cells" without making a mistake. Stumbles over numbers and acronyms. He has in his expression, in his eyes that are too close together, that faint look of panic that dyslexic children have when they think they're going to make a mistake and will be scolded for it, but they can't stop once they've started. Takes on a fake tough-guy look when he broaches the subject of Iraq. When he utters the word "America" or "army," he stops short—or, rather, stiffens, as if at the sound of an invisible bugle. Now, in Detroit, where he has come to speak to the National Urban League, the black civil-rights organization that has invited him, he frowns with concern when he talks about the city's poor neighborhoods.

I think about all that could be said about the ambivalence of his relationship with the earlier President Bush. I think of the discussion Alan Wolfe and I had the other evening about whether he started the war in Iraq in order to take revenge (Saddam humiliated my father, so I will humiliate Saddam), or in order to issue a huge Oedipal challenge (I'll do what he couldn't do—I'll obey another

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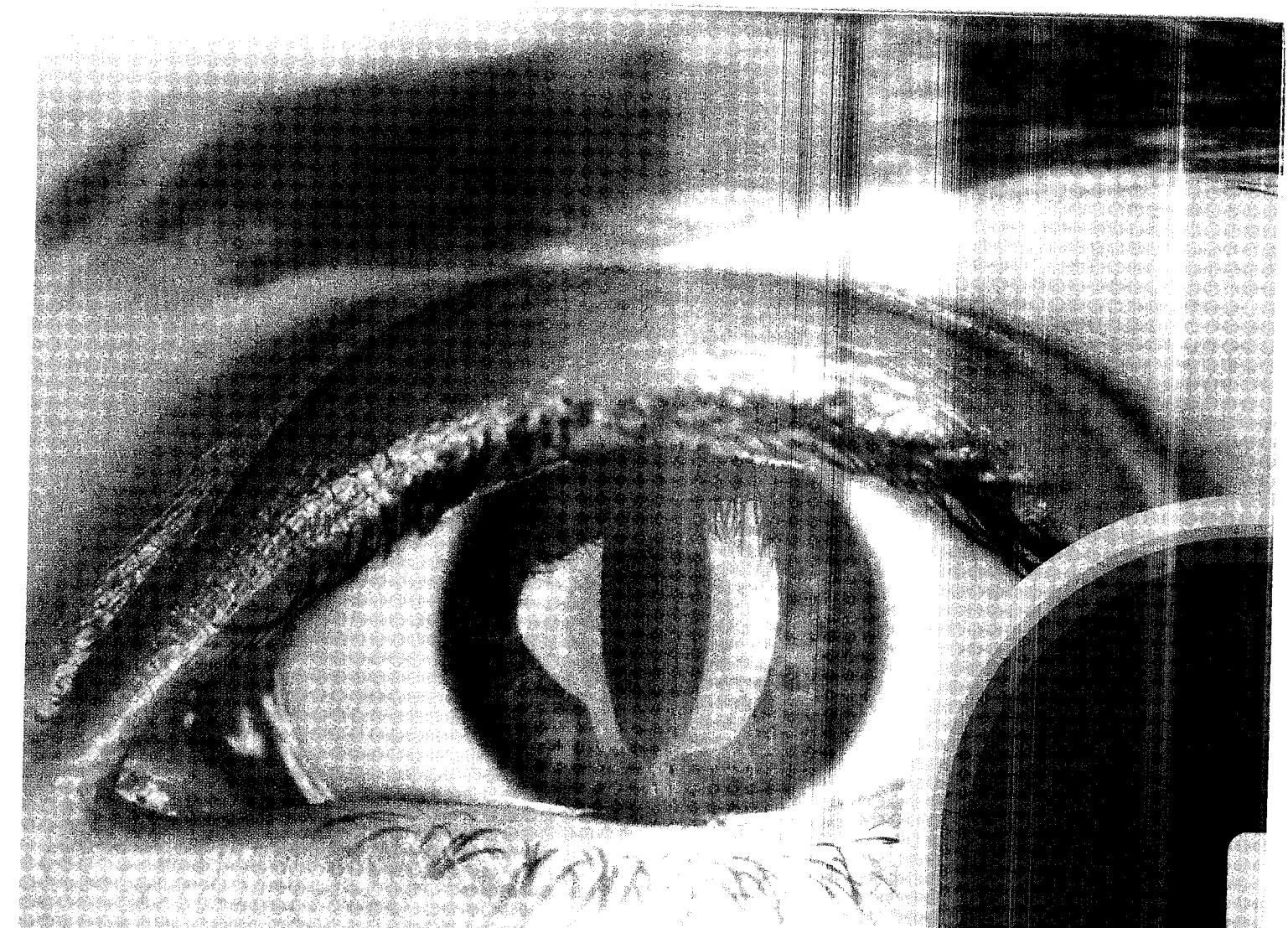

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father, who is higher than my own, and who inspires me to actions he couldn't inspire in my father). The truth is that this man is something of a child. Whether he's dependent on his father, his mother, his wife, or God Almighty, he looks to me this morning like one of those humiliated children Georges Bernanos was so good at creating, showing that their hardness stemmed from their shyness and fear.

That said, watch out. This shy man is shrewd, too. This child is a cunning child. He has the cleverness to call the president of the National Urban League, Marc Morial, by his first name, and to begin his speech, just after a prayer, with praise for the Detroit Pistons, the local basketball team. He has the talent to tell joke after joke and, like a good comedian warming up a difficult audience, to be the first to laugh, noisily, at his own jokes. He has the intelligence to call the two important black leaders who are sitting in the front row, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, by their first names too, to defuse their hostility. He does this also, after admitting that his party must earn the vote of African-Americans, by saying to Reverend Jackson, "You don't need to nod your head so hard at that, Jesse," and to Reverend Sharpton, "It's hard to run for office, isn't it, Al?"; everyone in the audience remembers the battle Sharpton has just lost for nomination by the Democratic Party.

To revere a counterfeit as if it were real. To prefer in a museum, even when one has a choice, reproductions over relics. What is at stake in each case is a relationship to time—as if one had to reassert the power of the present over the past.

Detroit is a city where Bush has, as he knows, "a lot of work to do" to win the hearts of a community that four years ago voted 94 percent for Al Gore. He is in enemy territory. The 2,000 people present came to see the man but don't share his ideology. Yet the trick is working. His riffs on the "American dream" and on small business; his audacity in attacking the power of bureaucracy and Washington, as if he hadn't been in the White House for four years; his vision of America as a blue-chip corporation in which all people are shareholders, and which wants everyone to get only richer; his talk about Sudan, finally, and about the genocide (though he does not use the word, he says that he will do what he can, if he is elected, to see that the rulers of Khartoum bring an end to the slaughter)—all of that ends up working. Nerve and naiveté. Tactical cleverness along with a certain candor. A delegate, as we are leaving, in the crush of radio and television teams that are asking the opinions of the attendees: "The son of a bitch—he got us ..." Another one: "That was good, the part about Sudan!" That's what strikes me, too, of course. But, even stranger, it's also that look of a resourceful little boy, a bit mischievous, who has to work hard to be a candidate and to be president. I picture him, in his native Texas, as a difficult youth, an average student, rowdy, worrying his parents no end. I imagine him at Phillips Academy, and then at Yale, trailed by a bad reputation as a string-puller and snubbed by the rich sons of East Coast families who find him useful but a little country-bumpkinish. I see him then, quite clearly, as a provincial narcissist and a frustrated dilettante, a bad businessman, an overgrown daddy's boy whom the family manages to save from each of his semi-failures. When was this pattern reversed? And how? Under whose influence, or under what influence, did the metamorphosis come about for the lover of backfiring cars and drinking bouts with his buddies, for the failure, the nice guy, the man no one for a long time would have thought had a chance of becoming anything at all? How did this man become a formidable machine capable of winning (now twice) the most difficult competition in America and, when it comes down to it, on the planet? There are men—Bill Clinton, for example—you feel were born to be president. Others—John Kennedy—who were formed, trained, for the office. He is the opposite: born to lose; raised above all not to win. And for this change of direction, this late-blooming grace that hasn't even had time to imprint itself on his face, no one has any real explanation—except him, when he talks about "grace," actually. And being born again.

A Jewish Model for Arab-Americans

How can one be an Arab—I mean, Arab and American? How can one in post-9/11 America remain loyal to one's Muslim faith and not be taken for a bad citizen? For the inhabitants of Dearborn, Michigan, a few miles west of Detroit, the question doesn't even arise. This town is a little special, of course. Its McDonald's, for instance, is halal. A supermarket is called Al Jazeera. There are mosques. I spot an old Ford with one of those personalized license plates that Americans love; it reads TALIBAN. And I quickly see that around River Rouge—the old Ford factory, parts of which are now reduced, like the Bethlehem Steel plant in Lackawanna, to rusted steel carcasses, useless pipes, empty silos, and half-destroyed warehouses in the middle of which trees are growing—conversations switch easily from Arabic to English and back. But all the people I meet, all the businessmen, politicians, community leaders, when I ask them how, in these times of al-Qaeda, these two interlinked identities can be combined, reply that actually everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The question of twofold allegiance that is poisoning the debate in France about where one belongs does not arise

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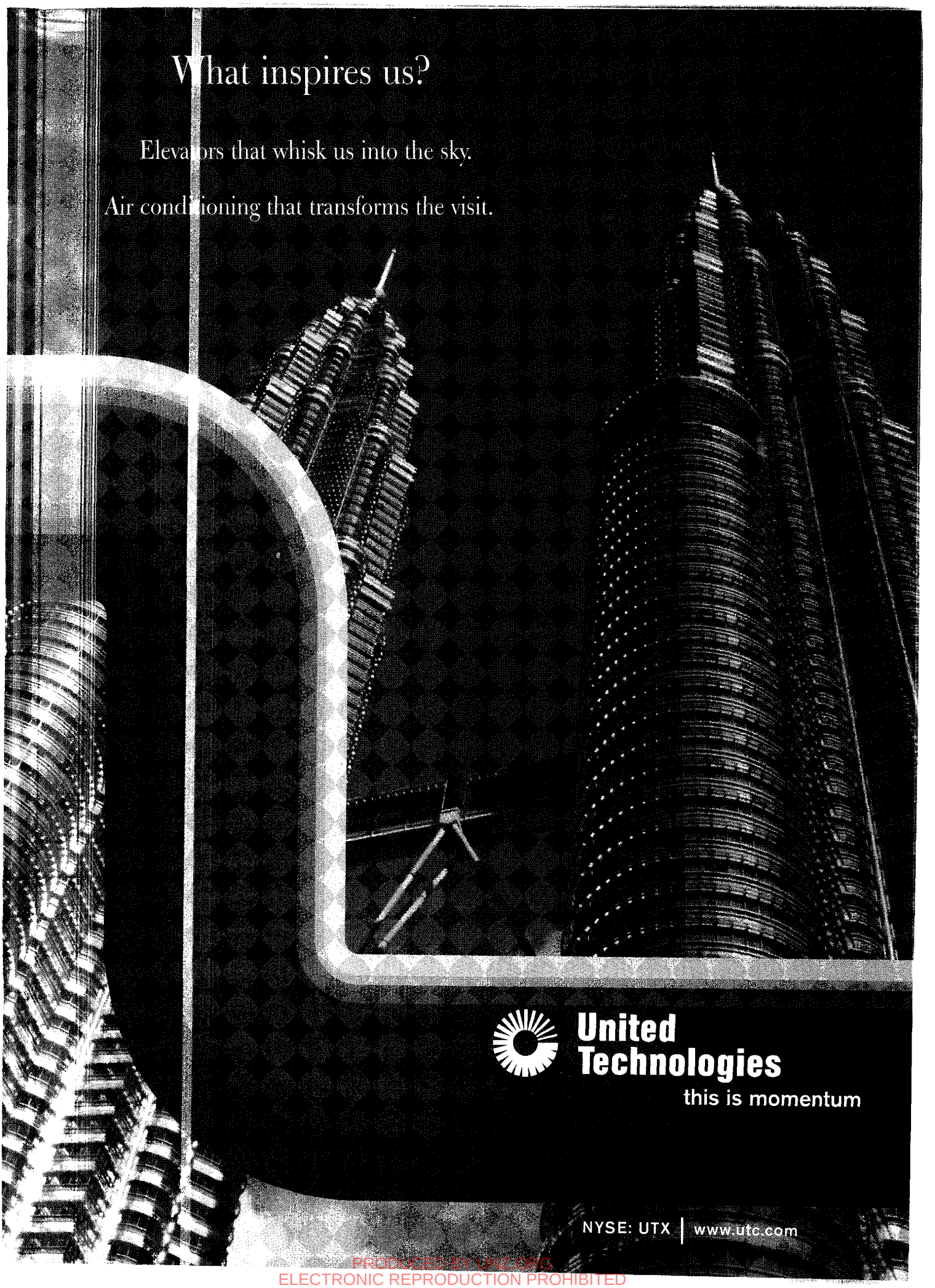

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here. Ahmed, wearing a turban like a Sikh, who sells utterly American sodas on Warren Avenue, says, "Of course there were problems; of course there was a backlash; of course the FBI agents came here to look for terrorists. But they didn't find any; we are exemplary American citizens, and they couldn't find any." Nasser M. Beydoun is a high-spirited young businessman, married to a Frenchwoman; it takes me a while to pick up that when he says "we," he means not "we Arabs" but "we Americans." He tells me, in the large conference room of the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce, of which he is a board member, "I was against the war in Iraq, but less for them, the Arabs, than for us, the Americans, this great nation with its fine culture, this exemplary democracy that's preparing a fate for itself as an occupying power."

And then there's Abed Hammoud, of the Arab-American Political Action Committee, a small organization whose role, he tells me, is to interview, review, and, eventually, endorse candidates at all levels of local or national power. When Bush wrote him, in 2000, a beautiful page-and-a-half personal letter beginning with "Dear Abed"; when Kerry asked him what procedure he should follow to get the support of the Arabs in Detroit, and he sent Kerry a copy of the letter to inspire him; when, last January, he organized a series of telephone interviews for Kerry and for Wesley Clark and a representative of Howard Dean; when he had one of his teams follow around a candidate for the Illinois legislature and be present at all his appearances and press conferences, even the smallest ones; when he finished off, this very morning, the information letter he sends to all his members—in all this, do I know what his example is? The Jews, obviously: the incredible success story that is the power of the Jewish community—what they succeeded in creating, this power they knew how to buy, to earn with the sweat of their brows, this path they made that led them to bring together all influences. "How can one not be inspired by that?" he asks. "We are fifty years late, I'll grant that; today they are ten times stronger than us. But you'll see, we'll get there; one day we'll be equal."

I'm not saying this little speech was without ulterior motives. Maybe the restraint of this statement was purely tactical and the idea is still, in the end, to do not just as well as but better than a Jewish community that is identified, without its being said, as the very face of the enemy. And I also felt in him a strong reticence about Israel, whose existence he is careful not to question, but where it is "out of the question" for him to travel as long as the "Palestinian resistance" hasn't been granted its rights by the "occupation."

But finally, the fact still remains. We are far from Islamberg, in the heart of the Catskills, that fundamentalist phalanstery I discovered during my investigation into the death of Daniel Pearl, where the terrorist ideologue Ali Shah Gilani is venerated. And we are even farther from those French suburbs where they shit on the flag and hiss at the national anthem, and where hatred for the country that has taken them in is equaled only by an anti-Semitism eager to go into action. My great American lesson. A fine lesson of democracy at work—that is, of integration and compromise. There are 115,000 Arab-Americans in the metropolitan-Detroit area. There are about 1.2 million scattered through Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and the rest of America. And despite Iraq, despite Bush, despite the hawks of the so-called clash of civilizations, these two traits dominate: the American dream, neither more nor less alive than in all the generations of Irish, Polish, German, or Italian immigrants who came before them; and, linked to that, a passion, an obsession, a mimetic rivalry, with a Jewish community that is regarded as an example and, at bottom, an obscure object of desire—a yearning to be, if I may say so, parodying the famous motto of the French Jews before the Dreyfus affair, *as happy as Jews in America.*

The question of twofold allegiance that is poisoning the debate in France about where one belongs does not arise here. Nasser M. Beydoun is a high-spirited young businessman; it takes me a while to pick up that when he says "we," he means not "we Arabs" but "we Americans."

THE LEFT LANE

On the road again. The highway. The great Interstate 94 that leads to Chicago, where we have to be before tonight. Distance. Space. These centimeters on the map, so deceptive to a European. This sense of space and thus of time passing, which is the real sixth sense one has to acquire when traveling in America. And then this legalism, too, this extraordinary sense of the law and the rules, which shapes people's conduct in general and that of motorists in particular. No excessive speeding, for instance. No screaming matches from car to car, as we have in France. No way, either, even on the outskirts of Battle Creek, where the traffic is at a complete standstill, to persuade Tim, the young man who is driving, to try to make up a little time by using the break-

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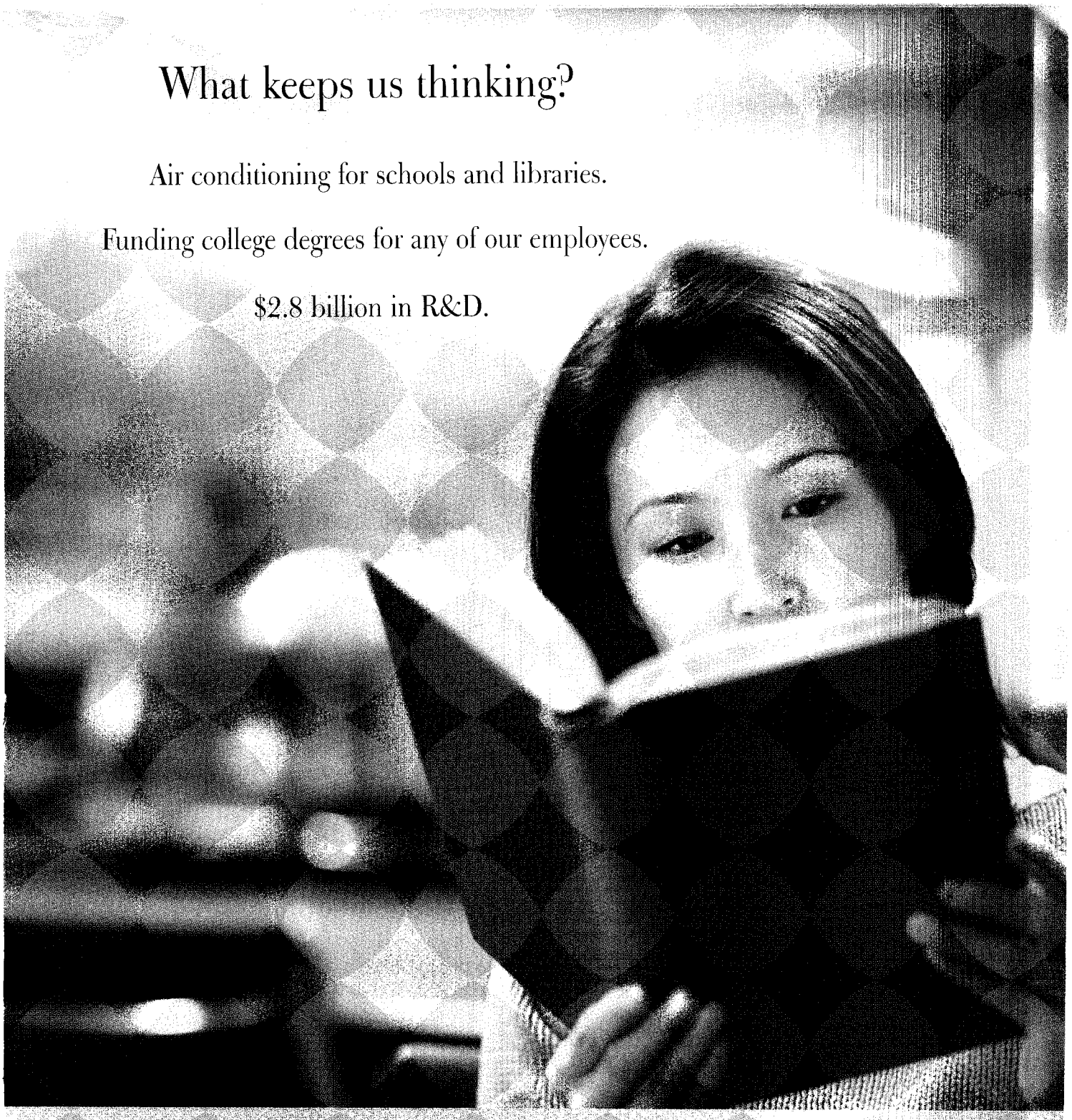
What keeps us thinking?

Air conditioning for schools and libraries.

Funding college degrees for any of our employees.

$2.8 billion in R&D.



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down lane. Or this other detail, perhaps even more bothersome, which says a lot about the anthropology of American automobile customs: in Europe the point of having a road with several lanes is to reserve one for slow cars, so that the fast ones, the ones in a hurry, which often happen to be the prettiest and most expensive cars, can drive as fast as they like in the lane reserved for them; here that is not the case. Both lanes are being used at the same speeds. Quick and slow, big and little, and thus, whether you like it or not, rich and poor, powerful and weak—all use their lane of choice interchangeably. If you're late, make sure not to blow your horn at the asshole who's blocking your way and who in France would comply and move over. You can shout, "Get out of the way, moron, and let me pass" all you like; that would make him give way in France. Here, not only will he not give way, not only will he keep going at his imperturbable pace, sure of his right of way, but you'll see through his window, if you finally manage to pass him, his indignant, alarmed, incredulous look—"Hey! Big and little, we're all in this together! This is an automobile democracy!" A real lesson, in the field, of equality of conditions where we French flaunt our social distinctions, our privileges. And a real example, once again, of the perspicacity of Tocqueville, who, more than a century before the birth of the highway, noted that "the first and liveliest of the passions inspired by equality of status" is "the love of equality itself." There we are.

Distance. Space. Centimeters on a map, so deceptive to a European. And then this extraordinary sense of the rules, which shapes people's conduct in general and that of motorists in particular.

Another incident, mid-afternoon, no less Tocquevillean.

Seized by a strong need to piss, and tired of the Starbucks, McDonald's, and Pizza Huts, where there are almost always signs telling you the name of the guy who "cleaned this bathroom with pride" and the name of the "supervisor" whom you should call "for comments and compliments," I ask Tim to let me off at the edge of a quiet field bathed in sunlight. Scarcely have I begun when I hear behind me the roar of a motor followed by a screeching of brakes. I turn around. It's a police car.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm getting some fresh air."

"You don't have the right to get fresh air."

"Okay, I'm pissing."

"You don't have the right to piss."

"What do I have a right to, then?"

"Nothing: it is forbidden on highways to stop, hang around, dawdle, and to piss."

"I didn't know ..."

"I don't give a damn what you know—keep moving."

"I'm French ..."

"I couldn't care less if you're French—the law's the same for everyone. Keep moving."

"I wrote a book on Daniel Pearl."

"Daniel who?"

"And a book on the forgotten wars."

"What kind of wars?"

"I'm writing about following the path of Tocqueville ..."

And suddenly, as the name Tocqueville is uttered, a sort of miracle occurs! The cop's face goes from suspicious to curious to almost friendly.

"Tocqueville—really? Alexis de Tocqueville?"

And after I tell him yes, Alexis, I'm following in the footsteps of this great compatriot who, 170 years ago, must have passed somewhere near here, this awkward customer, red with rage, who for all I knew was getting ready to book me for inappropriate behavior, for sexual display on a public highway, or, in any case, for "loitering with intent," looks at me with sudden affability and begins to ask me what, in my opinion, continues to be valid in Tocqueville's analysis.

Three lessons here. First, this "loitering with intent," which shows how paranoid American society after 9/11 has become. (Didn't I read the other day a story about a twenty-four-year-old Pakistani, Ansar Mahmood, who in the fall of 2001 was surprised as he was lingering near a water-treatment facility on the Hudson, and held in custody for three years before being deported?) Second, this command to "keep moving," which I had already noticed in the airports, and at the office in Washington where we went to get press badges, and in front of my hotel, which had the misfortune of being opposite the White House, and then again in New York, in front of the Ground Zero barricades: Paranoia again? Security obsession? Or a much deeper anxiety, ingrained in the American ethos, when faced with the very idea that movement can stop? And third, despite all that, the extraordinary image of this ordinary Michigan cop, a little stubborn, whose face lit up at the mere mention of this French friend of his country—what better reply to those who keep telling us that America is a country of backward cowboys and uneducated people? And what a magnificent challenge to those who want to use Francophobia as the last word these days in our transatlantic relations.

BARRY LEWIS/NETWORK PHOTOGRAPHERS

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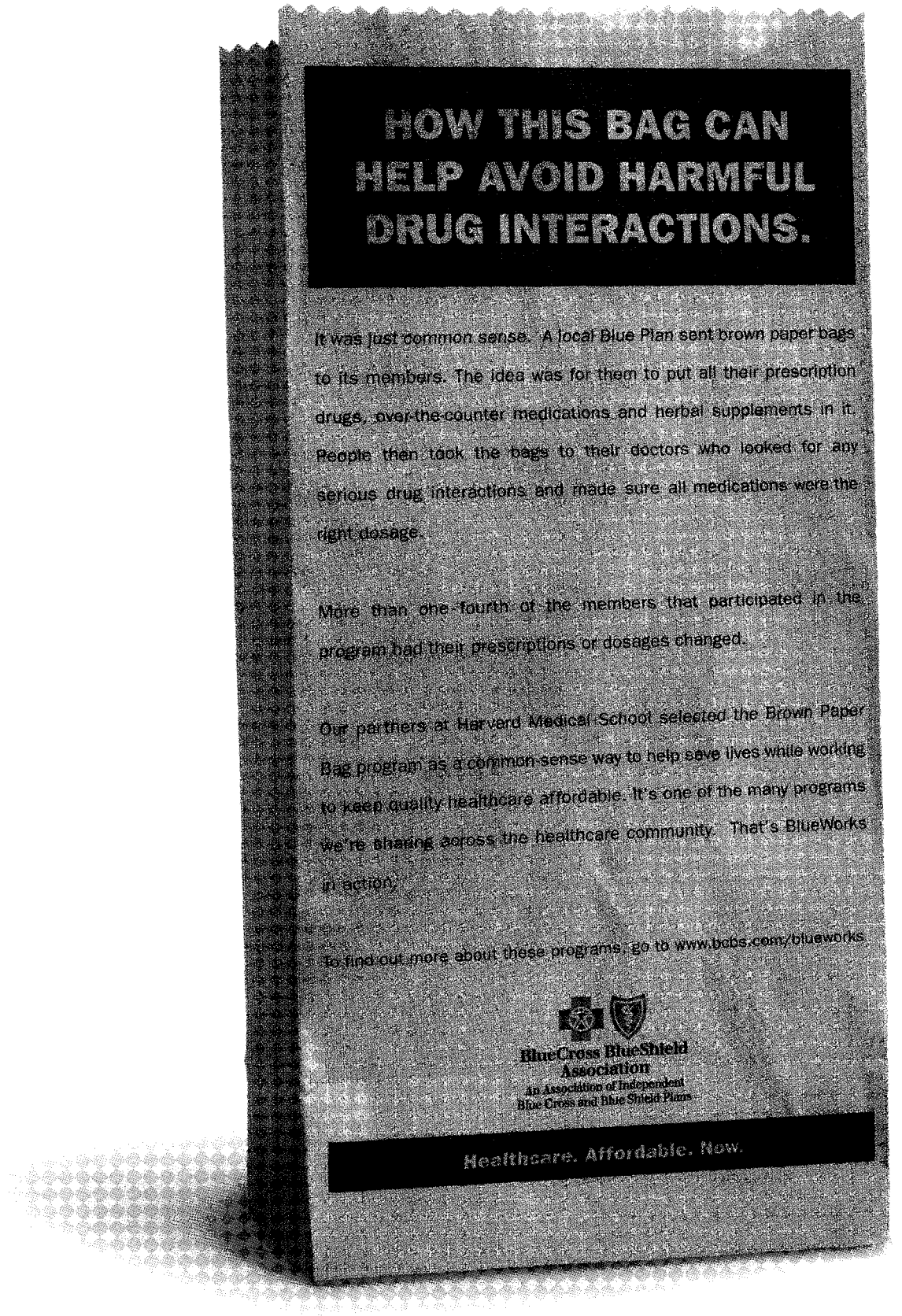

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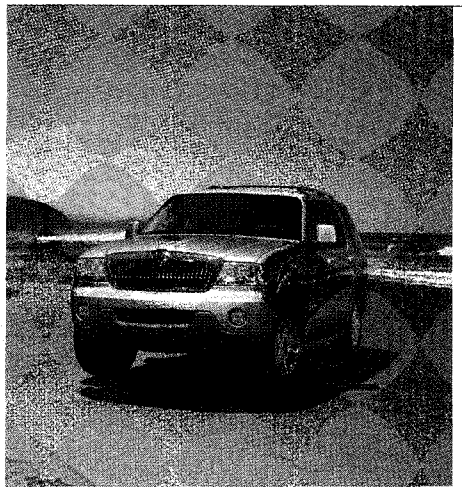
HOT STONE THERAPIES, COLD SEAWEED WRAPS AND THE

PROFOUND EFFECT OF TEMPERATURE ON MOOD.



Even at a spa, work can be stressful. Simply rolling back the moonroof* and heading down the coast can make the Lincoln Aviator a moving sanctuary.

Wailea, Maui. Punta Mita, Mexico. Carlsbad, California. These lush destinations draw the stressed-out in search of rejuvenation. As a spa director, Jeremy McCarthy travels the globe creating sanctuaries at some of the world's most luxurious resorts. "More than ever, people today are thinking about wellness. Not just physically, but also how the mind, body and spirit all interrelate to create a healthful state."

Integrating indulgences that invigorate and inspire is the idea behind the Lincoln Aviator. Its THX® Certified Audio System,* for example, can help transform a driver's state of mind. Its cabin, a harmonious mix of satin-nickel and rich leather trim, provides space simply to *breathe*. Luxurious for sure, its heated and cooled front seats* prove functional as well as rejuvenating. McCarthy suggests using the heat option for tight muscles. The cooling option in Aviator's supportive seats can help soothe a tired lower back on a long drive.

Using therapeutic temperature control harkens back to early cultures. "Ancient Hawaiian therapies used stones for healing. The heat is such a benefit to massage because it loosens up the muscles and promotes blood flow to the area being massaged. Following up with the cold therapy calms, soothes and clears out the toxins."

Rejuvenation is not limited to the spa environment. "Simply driving becomes a chance to escape," adds McCarthy. "The time we spend in our vehicle is another opportunity to be still, free our minds of thoughts and concentrate on the act of driving. It's like meditation."

Sanctuary comes in many forms. For today's driver, the sensory journey begins in Lincoln Aviator. For a complete interactive tour of the restorative luxuries available in the Lincoln Aviator, and Jeremy McCarthy's spa recommendations, visit us online.

lincoln.com

TRAVEL WELL

*Available feature.

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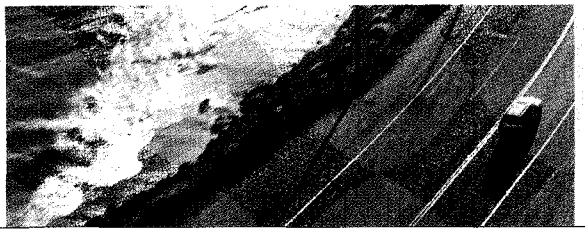
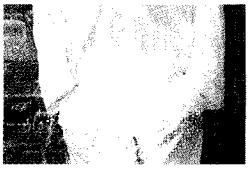
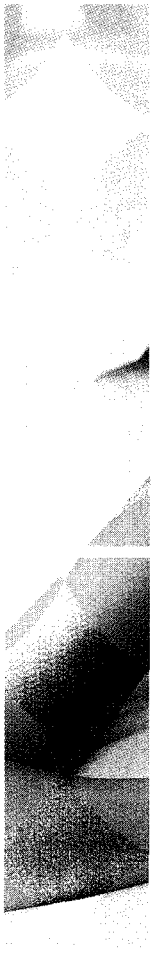


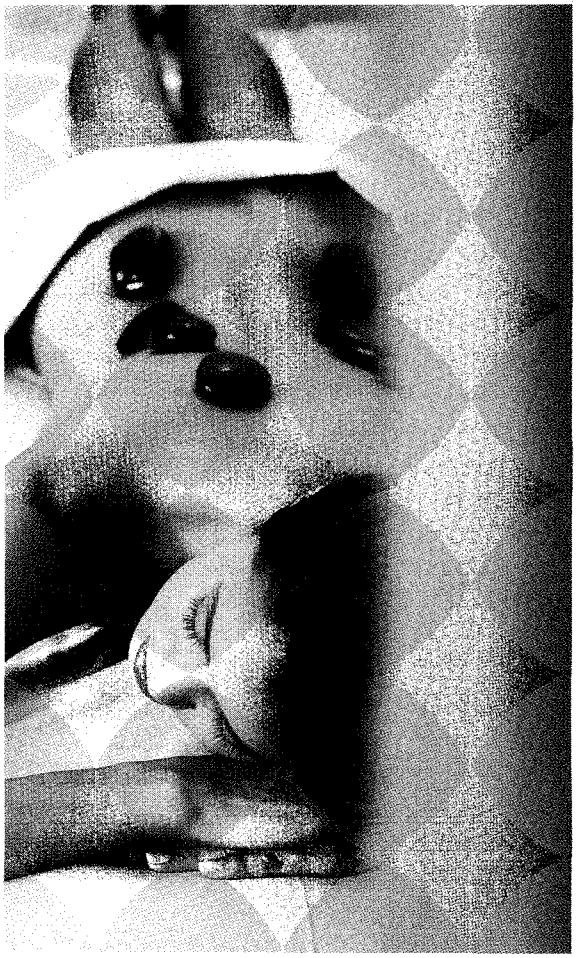
Jeremy's relaxation tips: "Every once in a while stop, take a moment. Sit. Breathe. And smile." May we also suggest the heated and cooled front seating* in the Lincoln Aviator?

"Combining hot and cold therapy is ideal. It can be incredibly healing as well as relaxing and rejuvenating."

Jeremy McCarthy
Spa Director, LaCosta Resort







LINCOLN

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CHICAGO TRANSFER

"Oh, no," Richard Daley, the mayor of Chicago, exclaimed yesterday evening during the inauguration of Millennium Park, which will be the pride of his city. "You aren't going to write us up, like all the visitors who are in a hurry and greedy for the sensational, as just the homeland of Chicago gangs, are you?" Daley, a little flushed in a slightly too small tuxedo, boasted about this other Chicago, the real one, the one that through his father's willpower and then his own; through the talent of Daniel Hudson Burnham and then of Edward H. Bennett, the city's architects, its landscapers, its Hausmanns; and thanks also to the simple decision to open up the city onto the lake and let the light in, has become this magical, beautiful city, perhaps the most beautiful city in the United States, whose apotheosis he is now celebrating, along with 2,000 handpicked guests. Mayor Daley is right. And I like the passion he shows as he talks about his taste for urbanism itself, his obsessions with ecology and art, his crusade for "green roofs," hanging gardens, lakeside towers, and also for Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. I like the idea of the other artists (Anish Kapoor and Frank Gehry, Jaume Plensa and Kathryn Gustafson) whom he has managed to attract for this park, with the help of the successors to the old magnates of steel, chewing gum, and sausages who made the city's first fortunes—with the help and money of all these new philanthropists parading past him in their evening gowns, their tuxedos, their face-lifts.

Except ... except that there is also the city conjured by James T. Farrell. There is, despite Daley's protests, the Chicago of junkies, bums, whores, freaks, and hoodlums portrayed by Nelson Algren (and Otto Preminger). There is—still on the subject of Nelson Algren—an astounding story that says a lot about the propensity of the city's inhabitants to forget its shadowy side. On Evergreen Street one can still see the apartment where Algren lived with Simone de Beauvoir. After Algren's death the street was baptized Nelson Algren Street before being quickly, almost immediately, re-baptized Evergreen Street, after formal protests by residents who did not think the novelist of the dregs of society was worthy of such commemoration.

There is this other part of the city, about which no one wants to speak, but which I took time this morning to explore a little: Chinatown; the neighborhood of the insane, released en masse from asylums during the Reagan years; the slums on Sacramento Avenue ... the division between Lawndale and La Villita, "The Little Village," mostly black on one side and mostly Hispanic on the other ... There is this other city, where the signs are in Spanish, where you can eat only tortillas and tacos, where the supermarket is called La Ilusión and the butcher is Aguas Calientes—there is this other city where the gang Latin Kings is still, after thirty years, waging its long war against the gang Two Sixers.

"Two Sixers," I am told, not without scorn, by the young Hispanic who is guiding me down Broadway to the famous Green Mill—half jazz club, half cocktail lounge, where, it is said, Al Capone was a regular. "Just 'Two Sixers.' Two and six. Like Twenty-sixth Street. Isn't that totally stupid—to call yourself the name of the street where you were born? We don't give a damn. We're the biggest gang in the city, with branches all over the country. The only problem is when the bastards come taunt us or try to pick up one of our girls right in front of us. We don't put up with that, and there can be fighting."

There was a fight that night. Gunfire near the Pilsen neighborhood. A punitive expedition against two blacks who, eight days before, had disrupted a Latin Kings wedding. Another member of the Latin Kings had discovered on the Internet that the two had made fun of the famous crown, the gang's symbol. Another incident: a member of the Two Sixers who saw, with his own eyes, a Latin King mimicking the victory sign that, in principle, is the rally sign of the Sixers. And yet another settling of accounts, linked to a matter of unpaid rent. The result of all this shows at the courthouse on California Boulevard, where I have a meeting this morning with Judge Paul B. Biebel: forty-five men, mostly black and Hispanic, arrested overnight. That's a lot, forty-five. It's too many for the handsome courtrooms whose coffered ceilings go back to the days of Mafia capos and a different kind of crime. And it's so much too much that they have to be assembled elsewhere, in a basement room, where they get processed by video conference: "Do you speak English? Name? Age? Occupation? ..." And the procession on the video of the faces of these small-time juvenile delinquents, shabby and blank-faced, most of them with no home or job, who seem to have stepped out of the pages of one of the city's native sons, Richard Wright. One monitor for the families, also packed in, but in waiting rooms with bulletproof glass, and another monitor for the judges, who yawn as they listen to these meager, frightened narratives in which the same stories keep emerging, of drug addiction, unemployment, mentally retarded people who never should have left the institution, two-time losers. The big shots of crime are happy. Thinking the city had become dangerous for their beloved children, they emigrated to the fashionable suburbs, where they live a perfectly bourgeois life as elegant, almost respectable followers of law and order. Perhaps—who knows?—even present, a few of them, last night, at the inauguration of Millennium Park.

THE GOD OF WILLOW CREEK

The banks in America look like churches. But here is a church that looks like a bank. It has the coldness of a bank: its futuristic, somber architecture. No cross, no stained-glass windows, no religious symbols at all. It is ten o'clock in the morning. The faithful are beginning to pour in. Or perhaps one should say "the public." Video screens are pretty much everywhere. A curtain rises to the side of the stage, revealing a picture window that opens

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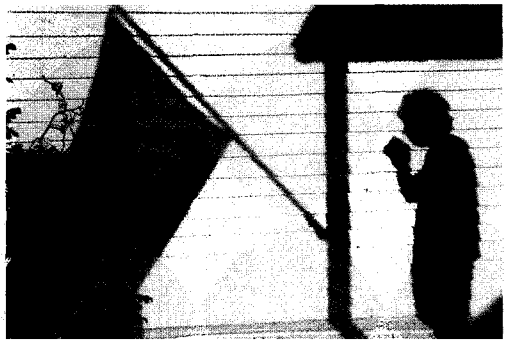
onto a landscape of lakes and greenery. And now the bank begins to resemble a congress.

On the stage a man and a child in shorts, under a tent, discussing the origin of the world, eating popcorn.

A female rock singer, thunderously applauded, whose shouts are repeated in chorus by the 5,000 people present: "I'm here to meet with you ... Come and meet with me ... Drive me into your arms ..."

Another man, in jeans and sneakers, jumps onto the stage: "Let's speak to our Creator." Then, to heaven, his hands cupping his mouth, "Yes, Creator, talk to us!"—again repeated by the audience.

And then the same man, turning back to the congregation, his voice scarcely able to rise above the noise from the guitars and drums: "Lee Strobel! Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Lee Strobel, who's coming back to us from California with his new book! On the *New York Times* best-seller list! TV celebrity! Give him a big round of applause, ladies and gentlemen!"



CARL D. WALSH / AURORA

What is obvious at Willow Creek is the power of a religion whose secret is simply to get rid of the distance, the remoteness, of the divine that is at the heart of European theologies. A present God this time, without mystery; a good-guy God; almost human, a good American.

At which point Lee Strobel arrives, a man about fifty years old, a sales-rep smile on a plump face, also wearing jeans and sneakers, and a nylon jacket—and between the two men, in this place of faith and prayer, this dialogue:

"My goodness! Our minister has changed his hairdo!"

"Bingo! You got that right! Barbra Streisand sent me her hairstylist!"

"And what have you come to talk to us about today?"

"I hesitated between 'Saving Your Marriage,' 'Rediscovering Your Self-Esteem,' and the 'Fit for Him' program that tells you how to lose weight through faith. But I finally decided in favor of the subject of my last book: 'God Proven by Science and Scholars.'"

A few gags. A quotation from the Epistle to the Romans. Then the lights go down. Now, on the main screen, sound effects blaring, a video begins titled "In the Heart of DNA," which shows a camera zooming inside a cell, exploring it, getting lost, encountering a thousand obstacles. Then it shows interviews with "former atheists," who have a whole string of academic titles, explaining how at the end of this maze, à la *Adventures of the Lost Ark*, there is God.

"The problem is Darwin," Lee Strobel says, in a tone that makes him sound as if he's advertising a product rather than preaching a sermon. "That's the subject of my book: if Darwin is right, then life develops all on its own and God is out of a job. Do you want God to be out of a job?"

The faithful murmur no, they don't want God to be unemployed, "It's like the miracle of bacteria—take one atom away from bacteria, and it's no longer bacteria. Isn't that proof that God exists? Isn't that proof that the Bible tells the truth? That, too, is demonstrated in my book."

This former journalist—who in another book tells how his marriage nearly foundered when his wife became a Christian, and was then salvaged when he converted too—finds ways to quote himself eight times in one hour. So when the time for book-signing arrives, several hundred of us are waiting quietly in line in the cafeteria, between airport-security cordons, to have him scribble "Hi, Matt!" or "Hi, Doug!" for us, accompanied by a promotional smile.

"French?" he asks me, looking slightly put off, when my turn comes.

"French, yes. And atheist."

Then this reply, as if he has changed his mind: "Oh! That's okay ... In that case, say the atheist's prayer—that works for the French, too ..."

And now he closes his eyes, puts his left hand on his heart while continuing to scrawl an almost illegible "Hi, Bernie!" with his right, and says, "'God, if you are there, show yourself.' That's the atheist's prayer."

Lee Strobel is not the pastor of Willow Creek. Because the holder of that title happens to be away, Strobel is just filling in. But the scenario, I am told by a couple, my neighbors in line, is always the same. The other churches are dying because they're churches of yes-men who come there without knowing why. Not us. We're a living church. Our ministers are of our time, just as Christ was of his time. And we make it a point of honor to have a *useful* religion: prayer channels, sharing and discussing visions, organizing telephone services transmitted to brothers and sisters in distress, mowing old people's lawns, feeding the neighbors' dog when they're on vacation, cleaning the toilets at Starbucks ... "There's a lot for a Christian to do!"

Inspired by a former member of the Baptist church on the Avenue du Maine, in Paris, deliberately "nondenominational" and, because of this, using every marketing technique

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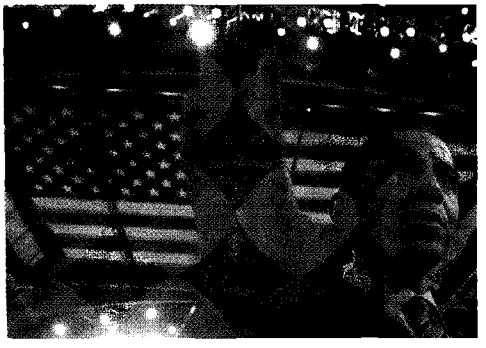
to target a maximum number of customers (sorry—potential faithful), the Willow Creek Community Church, in South Barrington, Illinois, gets 17,500 worshippers every weekend, and has 10,000 affiliated churches dotting the country. Power? Political influence and aim? That remains to be seen. What is obvious is the power of a religion whose secret is perhaps, simply, to get rid of the distance, the transcendence, and the remoteness of the divine that are at the heart of European theologies. A present God this time; a God who is there, behind the door or the curtain, and asks only to show himself; a God without mystery; a good-guy God; almost a human being, a good American, someone who loves you one by one, listens to you if you talk to him, answers if you ask him to—God the friend, who has your best interests at heart.

A BLACK CLINTON?

"Bernard-Henri Lévy," he repeats, mocking me a little, because when I introduced myself, I must have exaggerated the syllables. "With a name like that, you would have been a big hit at the convention." I have interrupted my westward drive for a few days to see the formal nomination of John Kerry at the Democratic National Convention, in Boston. In this hotel dining room where some of us have been waiting for him for over an hour, I ask, "And what about 'Barack Obama'? With a name like that, and with the success you had last night, you should be able to become president of the United States in five minutes." He laughs. Thumps me on the chest, pulls away a little as if to gather momentum to land a better punch, gives me a hug, laughs again, and repeats, like a nursery rhyme, "Barack Obama, Bernard-Henri Lévy ..."



Barack Obama. The first black man to stop playing on guilt and play on seduction instead? The first one to want to be America's promise, rather than its reproach?

This is the man who brought the house down yesterday, in the big Fleet Center. This is the perpetrator of the most authentic single event in an evening whose other attractions included the First Lady of Iowa; the mayor of Trenton; Tom Daschle, the South Dakota senator; and hundreds of people wearing hats draped with flags and hats in the shape of donkeys, skyscrapers, World Trade Centers. True, he didn't say much. In his insistence on claiming to be a follower of the Founding Fathers, in his saying over and over that America is a religious country and that he himself is a religious man, in the faith with which he exclaimed, "There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America," in his way of saying that the problem is not another president for another policy but a new president for the same policy the old one no longer has enough credit to follow—in all these things there was something desperately accommodating for a Frenchman who's used to big political disputes. But in the end ... his ease; his cheeky humor, a black Clinton; his bad-boy, Harvard-grad good looks; his white mother born in Kansas City, his black father born in Kenya ... In other words, this twofold mixture, mixed origins squared, this lively disavowal of all identities—including, and this is perhaps the most original of all, the southern African-American identity. Didn't his opponent in Illinois, the black Republican Alan Keyes, just reproach him for not being "black enough"? Who is this white black man who isn't even descended from a slave in the Deep South? His eloquence—this speech, which, like all the speeches over the past two days, was calibrated down to the slightest intonation, but whose smallest sigh he seemed to be improvising. The hall vibrated. As soon as he stood up, you could feel that something important was happening. And the first one to realize this was, as it should have been, the one whose role was being usurped: the Reverend Al Sharpton, the born agitator, the man of all the insolent remarks, and the author, incidentally, of the only unconventional speech at the entire convention, the only one who dared to jump the rails of party speechwriters and quote Ray Charles and shout, fist raised, that poor blacks were still waiting for the forty acres and a mule that had been promised a century and a half ago to the freed slaves. But at that point, suddenly, things didn't go as planned: his rage fell flat, his maledictions sounded false. Obama was there, and it was as if all the charm had gone out of the faded old star.

Barack Obama. We shouldn't forget that image of him when, at 11:00 P.M., he leaped onto the stage with his slightly dancing gait, was lit up by the spotlights, and turned his brown American face to an amazed audience. And we shouldn't forget, either, this image of him today, at the hotel: lighthearted, facetious, and then suddenly tired, a little slow, drugged by his success last night, almost boring when he undertakes to explain, in a drawling voice, inventing a stammer for himself as if he wanted to talk even more slowly, the fragility of all this. We shouldn't forget this moment of suspense, almost of uncertainty, when he says we shouldn't go faster than the music, that America is the country of meteoric careers, "next month somebody else will be the story." I look at Obama. I observe his magnificent gestures. I remember reading an article saying that Barack, in Swahili, means

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"blessed." And I feel that whatever he may say, something is at stake in this very posture, in this marked distance from all kinds of communities. The first black man to understand that you should stop playing on guilt and play on seduction instead? The first one to want to be America's promise, rather than its reproach? The beginning of the end for identity-based ideologies?

THE SENSE OF THE TRAGIC, KNOXVILLE STYLE

They give me, at the Hotel Fort Des Moines, the room that's reserved, eight days from now, for John Kerry.

I write down this detail because it's the first thing the receptionist tells me as I'm registering.

Better than that, they've taken care to display on my night table, next to a framed photo of the candidate playing the guitar, a plate of cheese wrapped in cellophane identical to the one that will be served to him on the evening of his arrival, and, in another frame, a copy of the fax sent by his press secretary detailing his mini-bar preferences: "Mixed nuts; chocolate chip cookies; diet soda (preferably Diet Coke in the can); bottled water; plain M&M's (no peanuts); regular Doritos."

The craze for the relic this time. A taste for preservation and for the museum, taken to the nth degree. No longer, as in Cooperstown, the artificial as opposed to the authentic. Nor is it as it was in Dearborn, where, the other day, I visited Henry Ford's Americana museum: everything that has existed will, one day or another, end up in a museum. We might as well make a museum for everything right away. Everything is becoming a relic; a mere plate of cheese is becoming a museum piece—but the museum piece is a plate of cheese that has not been eaten yet, or even served. It's a kind of ante-museum, a pre-relic.

Tour of Des Moines, this city with such an odd name, "Of the Monks," lost in the middle of nowhere, without charm, which must have been, during the time of the French, a great stopping place.

A quick visit to the Iowa State Fair, which opened this morning, and which, with its life-size cow made of butter, its prize for the fattest fowl, its giant hot dogs, seems to me like a festival of American kitsch.

But my real aim, what I came here for, is Knoxville, twenty miles west, where what *The Des Moines Register* (which, it must be said, doesn't skimp on adjectives for the Iowa State Fair) calls "the greatest car race in the world," the Knoxville Nationals, is beginning its forty-fourth running.

WELCOME TO KNOXVILLE, says a little road sign. Right next to it, on another, larger sign, are written the names of all the churches in town, most of them evangelical. Then, at the end of a complex of warehouses that contain the drivers' pits along with pizzerias and stands selling hamburgers, T-shirts, and French fries, is another Hall of Fame, where spectators are lining up; this is, in effect, another church, where the names of the greatest drivers—A. J. Foyt Jr., Mario Andretti, Karl Kinser—are venerated. And then, finally, the oval track, surrounded by stands full to the brim but surprisingly quiet: 5,000 or 6,000 people are there, mostly white, wearing shorts, cowboy hats or hunters' caps, and plaid shirts, a lot of them obese. It's a while before I realize that they're so quiet, so far from the European image of wild crowds of fans, because ... they're praying.

Taking a closer look, I see that the drivers, too, are praying. There are about a hundred of them, in the central part of the oval, gathered in groups in which one can make out, despite the distance, a sort of subtle hierarchy of allegiances and merits. They have embraced their families. Exchanged a few last words with their managers. Thanked the "dirt crews," those paid volunteers who came from all over the country for the honor of riding around the track in their pickup trucks several hours before the race, in order to pack down the sacred ground and give it good traction. The race drivers are getting ready to climb into their cars, built to their size and almost molded to their bodies; heads in helmets, helmets attached to the seats, so that the drivers can roll over as much as they like without ceasing to be one with their machines. Perhaps, at that instant, the most superstitious of them have one final thought for the martyr Mark Wilson, who died in a crash here in 2001. And so they pray.

When, after the final parade, the contest actually begins; when, after they've turned and turned again around the track, like Achilles and Hector before the ramparts of Troy, the heroes really speed up in earnest, in bunches of eight or ten, in a deafening, hellish roar; when the real champions detach themselves and, with the crowd holding its breath, confront one another in a swift and violent duel that never lasts more than a few dozen seconds, the match takes on the feeling of a joust, an ordeal, an epic and merciless tournament. And then one senses that it is death that's leading the dance—one senses that the drivers are taking all the risks and that the spectators, excited but still silent, deep down both dread and hope for an accident. Theater of cruelty. Waiting, as in duels or at public executions, for the moment of first blood. This ferocity, this violence, which Europe grants—and then halfheartedly—only through marginal ceremonies like bullfighting and boxing, here continues to hold full sway. Knoxville, or a taste of the hellish side of American society.

THE PLACE OF THE FANATICS

I had seen Peter Weir's film *Witness*, with Harrison Ford.

I knew that there was a strange, vaguely Anabaptist sect living ascetically, in accord with the old rhythm of nature and the harvests.

So, from Des Moines, before continuing my journey to the West Coast, I go in search of these famous Amish, the "plain people," whose precise whereabouts no one at first seems able to tell me.

I begin with Pella, a "historical village," guaranteed to be 100 percent fake and thus open from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.:

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"No, we're not Amish," a man tells me, a little annoyed; he is in charge of the twenty or so buildings erected exactly as if they were nineteenth-century. There's Vermeer Windmill, certified to be the same as a Dutch windmill from 1850, and the founder's office, an actual historic building, where the evocation of the past has been pushed to such a point that they've leaned a cane against the table at the exact place where the founder used to put it. "We aren't Amish; they gave you the wrong information ..."

We go on to the Amana Colonies and their seven villages, east of Des Moines, founded in the mid-nineteenth century by a sect of German "True Inspirationists" who had been persecuted by ordinary Lutherans. "We're not Amish," says Meg Merckens, the young actress who every afternoon, in a blue dress and a white cap, delivers "Home on the Iowa," a long monologue telling the stories of the good old times in the Amana Colonies. "People often confuse us, but despite the similarity of our names, we don't have anything to do with the Amish. You'll find them about forty miles farther on, in Kalona."

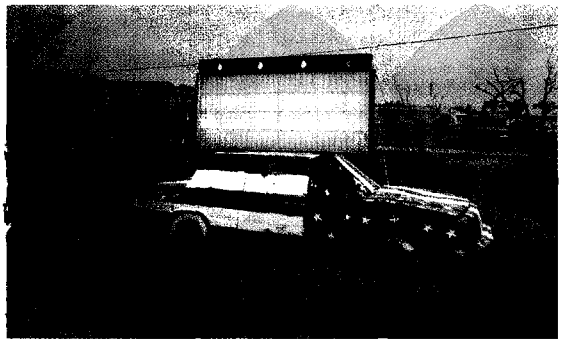
These other farmers, back from the fields, who shun a camera, are Amish: God said, "Thou shalt not make idols or images." All the more reason, then, not to make images of the face or the gaze.

Amish, finally, is the Community County Store, where they sell Amish bread, Amish barley sugar, Amish bobbins (stainless steel), Amish wrapping paper (handmade).

"You're using a calculator?" I ask the old, bent-over Amish woman who's running the till.

"Yes," she says in a surprisingly sharp, fluty voice. "Since it runs on batteries, it doesn't need electricity."

And when I try to find out more about the difficulty of being Amish in contemporary America—when I ask what kind of citizens the Amish are; if they vote, and if so, for whom; if they read the newspapers, and if so, which ones; what they thought of September 11; if they were concerned by the terrorist threat, and if so, in what way—a brief conversation begins, which is, unfortunately, too quickly interrupted by the woman's nephew, who is suspicious of us: No, the Amish generally don't vote; yes, the Amish are bad



NEVILLE ELDER/CORBIS

As the race drivers climb into their cars, built to their size and almost molded to their bodies, perhaps the most superstitious of them have one final thought for the martyr Mark Wilson, who died in a crash here in Knoxville in 2001. And so they pray.

So we continue on to the Kalona Historical Village, another Potemkin setting, once again empty, with its post office of the era, its saloon, its general store, still the same trompe l'oeil, the same set—except this time the set isn't just a set. On the neighboring farms there are actually men and women living according to the ancestral laws of the Amish.

Those farmers I see in the distance, working with the same kinds of tools they used a century and a half ago, are Amish.

These roads that are purposely not paved, where the wagons—for the Amish drive only in wagons—raise blinding clouds of dust in front of us, are Amish.

These men in brown trousers and wide suspenders, who look as if they'd stepped out of a painting by Le Nain, are Amish, as are these women wearing homespun dresses and white caps, who never cut their hair.

This refusal of electricity—except for the very ill—is Amish.

This rejection of higher education—and, in fact, of any education above eighth grade—is Amish. All this, for the plain people, is in the Bible; existence must be completely governed by what they read in the Bible.

patriots and bad citizens; an Amish can't be in the civil service or in the Army; to be Amish is to be indifferent to September 11, al-Qaeda, the security of Americans, and all the rest of it.

The old lady, moreover, doesn't say "Americans" but "the English."

For the Amish, the United States is not a country but an abstraction, a fiction.

Who are the Amish, then? Who are these men and women who live in an economic autarky, their gaze fixed on eternity? A countersociety? An anti-America within America? A case, unique in the West, of an a-communal community, putting into practice the biblical precept to set one's camp apart, separate? I remember how in the 1960s people talked about hippies who had modeled themselves on the Indians; maybe not, in the end—maybe the model was the Amish ...

Unless we ought to look at the thing in another way. Unless we should regard the stubbornness of the plain people as one aspect of this political philosophy—let's call it "exceptionalist"—that I'm sure is just as present in American hearts now as it was in the time of Tocqueville. A supplement to the social contract. An additional paragraph in the pact. This

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additional clause, this extra article, which was not foreseen by the Founding Fathers but is in accord with their intentions. Any logician knows that this is a necessity if a totality is not to become supersaturated, and that a society with built-in flexibility can better bring its designs to realization.

Or the opposite. They are witnesses not of God, but of America. The real, final pioneers. The only ones who haven't given in, haven't summed up their religion as the "In God We Trust" of banknotes. They are witnesses to a lost purity. The heirs of the *Mayflower*. The silent witnesses, truly silent, since, unlike the Indians or the blacks, they don't say anything, don't demand anything, and above all don't reproach others for anything. Silent witnesses, then, to the values that were those of America but on which America has turned its back since it sold itself to the religion of commodity.

Not anti-America but hyper-America. A conservatory. A remnant of the Bible's meaning. America's living bad conscience but, once again, silent. You betrayed the ideals of the Founding Fathers? Turned your back on your principles? America is a failed country? An unrealized utopia? Well, then, here we are. Just here. We don't criticize anything. But we are the Amish. The profound, hidden, forgotten, denied truth of America, alive in us.

They come here to the Mall of America to pick one another up. Flirt. Hang out. Get married. Yes, marriage is very important. There is a place on the third floor that offers you a choice of weddings: "Premiere," "Petite Plus," "Petite," or "Dream Plus."

The conundrum—and grandeur—of a country that tolerates this. I try to picture the Amish in France. I can't imagine those 200,000 men and women, their testimony, their positive demography, in my old Jacobin country, so finicky about the rites of its own national religion.

TOCQUEVILLE IN MINNESOTA

It's a mall. The biggest one in the United States. The second biggest in the world, after the one in West Edmonton, Alberta. It's a complex of 500 stores, placed on the southern outskirts of Minneapolis—we have driven north from Iowa—where, let it be said in passing, I saw baseball bats "made in Honduras"; T-shirts "made in Peru"; garden gnomes and beachwear "made in Bangladesh"; dolls "made in Mexico," in the likenesses of Reagan, Kennedy, and Clinton; all kinds of "Americana" made in Sri Lanka, Egypt, Jamaica, the Philippines, Chile, India, Korea; but not all that much made in America. It's a New Age temple of consumption. It's a church—yet another!—to the glory of triumphant capitalism and neo-American living for business. Except—and this is where things get interesting—it's meant to be a lively gathering place. It's the one place in maybe all of Minnesota where lonely social misfits, addicted to the Internet and to the glamour of the virtual, come to experience reality and get a shot of physical community. There are day-care centers here. Restaurants. Cinema multiplexes showing the best Hollywood has to offer. A bank where you can deposit your money before you spend it. An amusement park, "Camp Snoopy," with a roller-coaster and elaborate fountains. Lego dinosaurs in the Lego Imagination Center. A business school, the National American University, for hardworking teenagers. Greenery. A health clinic. What haven't the mall designers thought of? What possible circumstance of existence hasn't found a setting in this cocoon, this happy metropolis, where you could, in principle, spend your entire life? There are "mall walkers," about 200 a day, who come here not to buy anything but just to walk, because it's free, the weather is always clement, never too hot or too cold, and, above all, it's safe, without danger, under surveillance 24/7. They even ended up forbidding children under fifteen to enter after 6:00 P.M. on Fridays and Saturdays unless accompanied by an adult, when word got out that bands of wild children were preparing to sow terror here, like wolves. Hence the patrols of volunteer "Mighty Moms" and "Dedicated Dads" who come on the weekends to watch over and chaperone unruly children. So you have to wait till you turn fifteen to have the privilege of attaining the holy of holies and becoming a true Mall goer. The ideal thing is to celebrate your eighteenth birthday here at the Mall. There is an entire population in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul whose dream is to come here on the major occasions of life, to these long, windowless galleries, devoid of fresh air, dotted with surveillance cameras and the occasional sniffer dog, noisy, stifling. They come here to pick one another up. Flirt. Lift their spirits when things aren't going well. Hang out. Give themselves a festive honeymoon. Get married. Yes, marriage is very important. There is a place on the third floor, next to a store that sells wedding gowns and accessories, where a stout little woman with a machine-gun delivery offers you a choice of weddings: "Premiere" (a one-hour ceremony with music, champagne, and pre-wedding consultation, all for

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$669 on Mondays and Tuesdays, $699 other weekdays, $799 Saturdays), "Petite Plus" (half an hour; fifty guests instead of seventy; $569, $599, $699), "Petite" (thirty guests; $469, $499, $599), or "Dream Plus" (same thing, but with twelve guests; $369, $399, $499).

The Mall is an adventure—a big, modern, total adventure. Judging from the number of customers in the souvenir shops that sell coffee mugs, glasses, beer mugs, T-shirts, and other trimmings marked with the arms and colors of the Mall, it's an experience in itself. What does this experience tell us? What is the effect on the Americans of today of this confined space, this aquarium, where only a semblance of life seems to subsist? It brings to mind the easily led, almost animal-like face Alexandre Kojève said would be the face of humanity at the arrival (which he described as imminent) of the end of history. It brings to mind the "absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild" authority predicted by Tocqueville, the dominant characteristic of which would be a state of "perpetual childhood" in which the master is "well content that the people should enjoy themselves provided they have only enjoyment in mind." And in both cases we are gripped by an obscure terror, as if, suddenly, we have discovered the true face of Big Brother: enveloping and gentle, pure love—and thus all the more perilous.

MASQUERADE

Since Sioux Falls, I've been in South Dakota. The prairies. The motorcyclists. Bands of bikers headed out of Rapid City with their leather jackets, high boots, metal insignia on their backs, bandannas over their hair, aviator sunglasses. Mitchell and its Corn Palace. Chamberlain and its St. Joseph Indian School, where for a long time Indian children were "re-educated." The prairies again. The desert. Long, well-defined clouds. At the end of the day, after ten hours on the road, descent into the Lower Brule Reservation: sagebrush, shrubs, bumpy road, old cars, signs posting the number of fatal accidents due to the hairpin turns, bony animals inside ramshackle pens, herds of cows in the distance, drunkards lying by the side of the road, little lakes. And then finally Lower Brule—Lower Brule proper. I was expecting a village, but I find scattered houses, mobile homes; one final pond, infested with mosquitoes; a shabby casino, the Golden Buffalo—nothing like the glittering temples I hear Indian tribes have such a monopoly on, just grimy slot machines in an old-saloon décor, a handful of woozy, sad little white men weaving in and out at the tables, clutching their chips. And then a little farther on, in the middle of a field, a circle marked out as if for a rodeo, tents, plastic chairs and wooden stands beneath the tents. This is where the powwow will take place, the sacred dance at which, as a signal honor, two groups of white people will be in attendance: my companions and I, and the senator from South Dakota, Tom Daschle, in a tough re-election bid, and his family.

Conversation with John Yellowbird Steele, then the president of the Tribal Agency, a small, portly, healthy-looking man, baseball hat and jacket, Ray-Bans, whom I ask why the American Indians haven't thought of creating a memorial, as the Jews have done. "Our memories are here," he replies, hitting his chest. "Here, inside of us. A memorial would only make things harder; it would point a finger at the whites and irritate them. It's much wiser to exploit the suffering of the Indians. Yes, I did say 'exploit.' Wait for the senator—you'll see what I mean."

Reply of Linda Vargas, a social worker in Lower Brule, dancer's waist, sexy, pretty gray bun beneath a cowboy hat, a lot like Bardot in *Viva Maria*, who hears the end of the conversation and explodes: "Corrupt traitor! The people who peddle Indian suffering like that are horrible. There is a reason to reject your idea for a memorial, but it has nothing to do with what that sellout tells you. You make a memorial to signify that the war is over, but this war isn't over—just look at the expropriations that are continuing, the broken treaties, the genocide that's still going on. The war isn't over, so a memorial has no reason to exist."

Meantime, the stands and the plastic chairs are beginning to fill with people: too-thin, sly-looking children; women prematurely aged; men in jeans and leather jackets, with only their tied-back hair—and, alas, their broken faces, devastated by alcohol and poverty—distinguishing them from average American farmers. The entire local Bureau of Indian Affairs is here, along with employees from Wells Fargo and from the Lower Brule Farm Corporation (the nation's largest producer of popcorn), people from the Indian Health Services and from the casino, and the unemployed, the tramps. In Lower Brule there are 1,362 Indians registered, of whom at least a third are needy. It looks like all of them are here.

And then, finally, the crowd perks up: Senator Daschle has arrived, hair neatly arranged, clean-cut, beige trousers a little too short, red-checked shirt with no jacket, accompanied by his wife, his daughter, his son. Photos, autographs, a light touch on the shoulders of the disabled, handshakes with Yellowbird, kisses for the young Indian girls in yellow polo shirts, not particularly Indian-looking, who are holding placards that say TOM DASCHLE: A STRONG VOICE FOR INDIAN COUNTRY, and the masquerade can begin.

When I say "masquerade," I am not thinking of the dance itself, which is very beautiful, very moving, with its hundred or so women covered in jewelry, its warriors with painted faces and looks of bliss, its medicine men wearing large angel wings on their backs, its elders at the head of the procession rhythmically striking the ground with their spears, its feathered flutes and its drums, its smooth, modulated chants suddenly rising in pitch: "'I am a Lakota, I suffer for my people'—that's Crazy Horse's song," my neighbor whispers to me, moved to tears.

No. I'm thinking of the Daschle family leading the dance. I'm thinking of the image of Linda, the senator's wife, sweater tied over her shoulders as if she were going

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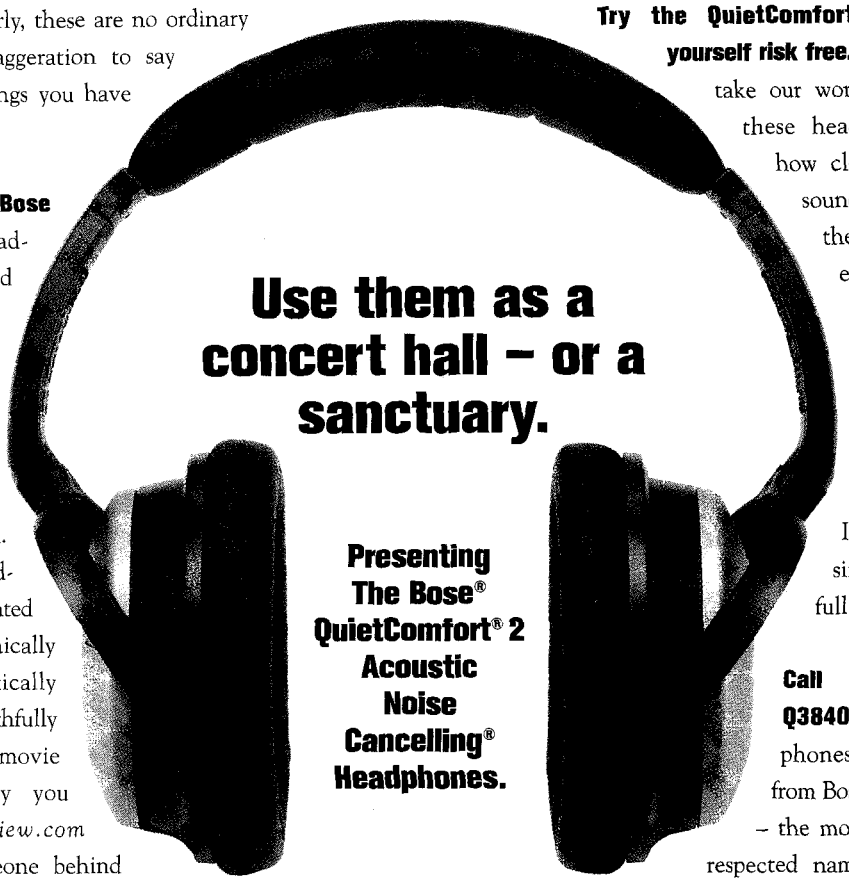

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to Newport for the weekend, dancing to the wrong beat. I'm thinking of his awkward son, his mind elsewhere, stiff, softly tapping his foot, without bothering to follow the rhythm. I'm thinking of his daughter, all smiles, gracefully waving her hand between two Indian women in a trance. And I'm thinking of Daschle himself, angling his way, for the photo op, between the lead dancers. A strange ballet, a little macabre, but one that without him would have been beautiful: one Lakota warrior brandishing the American flag, and another carrying a Lakota banner—long sliding steps, genuflections, modulated cries, then heads thrown up to the sky as a sign of ecstasy or despair.

How can we forget what these dances signified, and what, perhaps, they still signify? How can we not recognize that these are the same ghost dances that a century ago aroused such keen terror in Daschle's ancestors that they forbade them under penalty of death? How can we not recall Wounded Knee and the end of Sitting Bull? How can we not keep in mind those thousands of Indians massacred because they devoted themselves to these same dances that Tom Daschle and his family are aping? When I say "masquerade," I'm also thinking of the Indians who consent to this aping. I'm thinking of the chief who, afterward, standing next to the senator, declaims that the Lakota people took the flag from Custer's hands, and now the flag belongs to them. I'm thinking of the soup being passed out by the senator's majorettes, in T-shirts and orange caps, at the end of the ceremony.

I think of Tocqueville's disappointment when he arrived in Buffalo and, instead of those "savages on whose face nature had left a trace of some of those high virtues the spirit of freedom engenders," met men "of small stature," their "ignoble and mischievous faces" marked by the "vices" and "depravations" of both their civilization and our own. And the melancholy of Chateaubriand, then of Fenimore Cooper, faced with the "last of the Mohicans." What would they have said, any of them, about this sacred ceremony in Lower Brule?

AN INDIAN HERO AND HIS JOKE

Academic question: Does the status of being a victim, or a spokesperson for victims, entitle you to every right? Field research: meeting with Russell Means, the famous activist, a veteran of a 1973 takeover of Wounded Knee, friend of Marlon Brando, indefatigable advocate of the Indian cause, icon, hero, colorful and legendary figure. I am happy and proud to meet him.

Where the scene takes place: the heart of the Pine Ridge Reservation, in the middle of some deserted land between Potato Creek and Porcupine, a dilapidated house, reached by a path leading through wild grass and then over dilapidated boards that straddle a stream of wastewater—his house? His house.

Setting: untidy little kitchen; long table around which we take our places when the interview begins; books on the floor; a big fax machine from twenty years ago; watercolors I think at first are stained-glass windows, which he tells me he painted himself; photos from films in which he appeared, as Chief Big Tree and Chief Thundercloud did before him; poster saying DON'T BLAME ME, I VOTED FOR RUSSELL MEANS; leaflets from the campaign he's running now, for the presidency of the Tribal Agency, against the man from yesterday's powwow, John Yellowbird Steele; and leaflets in support of George W. Bush, whose side I already knew he had joined.

First sentence, while he's still standing in the doorway, very tall in the harsh noon light, very imposing, long black hair tied in a ponytail reaching the middle of his back, shorts and ink-blue undershirt, sneakers, strong biceps under bare skin, energy, charisma, rings on his fingers, a bracelet—this is his welcoming sentence, accompanied by an immense burst of laughter: "You here, Mr. Lévy? Not in Israel yet? But I heard on the radio that Sharon wanted all the Jews in France to emigrate to Tel Aviv! Ha, ha!"

And when I give a start, when I let him know that I haven't come all this way to listen to this kind of bad joke, and show that I don't find this sort of thing particularly funny, that I'm a Jew who is sympathetic to the Indian cause and that I came expressly to ask him about creating a kind of Yad Vashem of Indian suffering rather than the casinos that are a slow-working poison, I get this terrible reply, which is hammered out, word by word, in a restrained, affected tone of rage: "I don't need advice from Zionists, you understand? I don't need their advice. When I needed them, they weren't there. I went to see them, I went to see the Jews in Cleveland, and I waited—oh! I waited a long time. And no one—you hear me?—no one answered my call. So don't try to give me advice! A little respect, but no advice!

"What? The Moonies? Yes, sir, that's right, it's not a rumor—it's true that I gave a series of lectures sponsored by the Moonies. They've done less harm to me than the Catholics. Unlike you Jews, they held out their hand to me. When you're in our situation, Mr. Lévy, when the whole world is against you, you're not choosy, you take what you can . . ."

The rest of the interview is weird, vehement, sometimes zany, but, all the same, more controlled. When I tell him about the powwow, Russell Means replies that "Tom Daschle is a snake," "the worst human being in America," and that's why he's a leader of the Democratic Party. He explains to me that "Indian politics," as it was formalized in "the Indian Reorganization Act" of 1934, accomplished the feat of being the "secret model for Hitler" in its treatment of the "unwanted." It was the "carbon copy," "thirty years early," of "the Bantu Development Act," which "institutionalized apartheid in South Africa," and today, in this beginning of the twenty-first century, is the last case in the world of "pure and simple communism." He warns me, with fiery gaze and stentorian voice, that "every official Indian person you meet in this country" is corrupt and a collaborator—You understand? A collaborator. (He actually says, straining at a French accent, "a Vichy.") He talks, not without eloquence,

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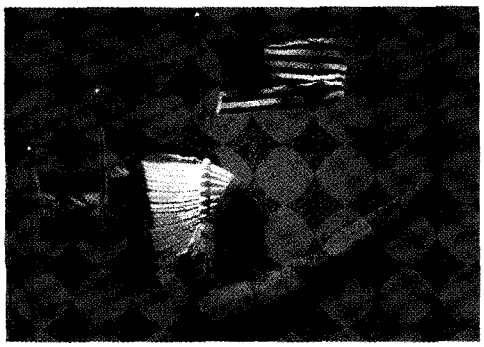
about these Indians, his people, who are sitting on "forty percent of the wealth of natural resources in America," but who remain "the poorest of the poor," "the most diseased people in the Western hemisphere." I am treated to a comical but sincere exposition on the necessity of "kicking out the white man"—in other words, seceding. At the same time, without seeming to realize any contradiction, he points out that the Indians could take advantage of the fact that reservations "don't have to worry about minimum wage," don't have "health-benefit problems," and, especially, "have no unions" in order to "attract industry." He says fine things about neglected Indian languages. He preaches about the greatness of this culture that, like the culture of the ancient Greeks, emphasized, and continues to emphasize, heroism.

God knows he liked them, the Indians ... God knows he still likes them when they have the faces of Louis Owens, Ron Querry, Sherman Alexie, his writer friends. But Russell Means ... he doesn't know Russell Means, of course. But he can guess. He knows the ravages the white culture makes when it corrupts hearts and souls. He knows how it can transform the best into pathetic clowns, mimes, phantoms of themselves. A memorial? Fine, a memorial. We could even, if I insist, start an international committee for the memorial. But it's not a memorial that will give back Crazy Horse his soul, or save the sublime heritage of Sitting Bull. Have I read the book by James Welch, by the way, on the Battle of the Little Bighorn? Since my arrival have I felt the electric, still magical atmosphere that reigns over Wounded Knee? No, of course I didn't feel anything. The cause is lost; we don't feel anything anymore. Only the writers remain, those guardians of the dead—but good-bye to living souls, farewell to Indian culture.



Russell Means calls the Indians "the poorest of the poor." Without seeing any contradiction, he points out that they could take advantage of the fact that reservations "don't have to worry about minimum wage" and, especially, "have no unions" in order to "attract industry."

Don't talk about Indians in the past tense, he thunders. Don't think that the death of their world and their values is an established fact. That's not the case. That's the surprise. We are the community in America with the highest growth rate: there were 250,000 of us a century ago, but there are more than two million of us today. That's our answer, Mr. Lévy, to the policy of genocide ...

But nothing can make me forget his first few sentences.

To whom should the crown of martyrdom go? Who should be awarded the terrible role of king of suffering? Are the Jews, with their Shoah, their obsessive memory, their lobbying, causing us irremediable harm? That, roughly, is what he said. And as long as there are Indian leaders who use this kind of language; as long as they don't break with the crazy logic of a competition for victimhood and a war of memories and sufferings; as long, consequently, as they give in to an anti-Semitism that has always found its most facile arguments in this very war, there will be a shadow over the legitimacy of the cause that they defend.

Meeting With Jim Harrison

Here I discover someone who is not surprised by the reaction of Russell Means.

The meeting takes place the next day, at Chatham's Livingston Bar and Grill, in Livingston, in the heart of Montana, where the novelist Jim Harrison moved because he'd had enough of seeing his Michigan invaded by Republicans and stockbrokers.

Big Jim is sad. He looks at me with his one eye, and then looks at the already empty bottle of Côte du Rhône his friend Chatham replenishes pronto, following a wordless but seemingly regular ritual, and he is sad. He becomes more animated when he talks about his house in the mountains, where he hears the song of nature. Or when he talks about the return of wolves to Montana and the fact that never—understand? never—has a case of a wolf's attacking a human being been authenticated. Or when he talks about his taste for Faulkner, whom he prefers to Hemingway—it's annoying, in the end, this way journalists who are in a hurry always compare him to Hemingway, whereas Faulkner is his real brother, Faulkner is the true writer. His enthusiasm revives, too, when he talks about France, which gave him so much, at a time when America was treating him like trash. He gets excited when he begins to talk about jet lag, that delicious state when you're not only between two spaces but between two times, earlier or later, twilight or morning in the world. You'd need a poem to express the blessing of this in-between state when you're in Paris, at the Hotel de Suède, or at your friend Bourgois's place!

But as soon as the conversation turns back to America—not just the Indians but America in general, this America that, he says, has never been so poor, so commonplace, or

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so freedom-stifling since Nixon—as soon as we start talking about that, a look of overwhelmed weariness settles on his old swashbuckling face, which becomes streaked with red or tinged with mauve the more he drinks.

Okay, I say to him. But Nixon's America was also the America of the 1960s revolution, wasn't it? Can't we imagine the same thing? Doesn't he feel, in the inmost depths of his country, a burst of the same kind of freedom? And shouldn't he put his fame, his legend, at the service of ...?

He looks at me then as if I didn't have a clue. Gestures to me to stop speaking. Empties his glass. Looks at the ceiling like a blind man who is trying to remember what light looks like. Then he lets out an enormous, completely unexpected laugh, which makes the restaurant customers in the other room turn around.

Stop with the legend, he tells me. That was exactly what I couldn't stand about Hemingway. And that's what ended up killing him. As for me ... I'll die of something, obviously—maybe from that (he points to the new bottle, already diminished). Or from something else (he looks at Anika, my assistant). But definitely not from that damned legend, which has nothing to do with me!

And then, there's no comparison, he goes on to say. The situation now, he insists, is much worse than it was under Nixon. There are the far-right Republicans and the politically correct left. The ones greedy for business, on the one hand; on the other, the morons who want to prevent us, my pal Nicholson and me, from smoking, drinking, and (another look at my assistant) appreciating the beauty of the world. The real problem—I'll tell you what it is. It's Yale. Yes, Yale. The school of Bush and Kerry. I knew that one day Yale would take over. Well, here it is—that day has come. And this triumph of the great predator, this victory of greedy pigs over progressives, that's the absolute truth of America. Do you know that I told Hollywood to fuck off the day I thought the system was going crazy and, by paying me too much, was about to transform me, too, into a big, insatiable, greedy bastard? All you can do is refuse. And laugh. And write literature. And, like the Indians, save the dead. And since we're back to the Indians, all that's left is for each one of us to save the Indian part that's inside himself.

The Indian as a category of the soul? A region of being and of the spirit? Harrison at that instant is talking the way Bohumil Hrabal did in his Prague apartment in 1989. He is talking more or less as my dissident friends did in Russia during the Iron Curtain years, who wanted to believe in nothing but moral resistance, hidden away in the heart of every person. There you have it. Writer and dissident. The fine withdrawal of a man, discouraged but uncompromising, without illusions but on the offensive, who as long as there are free men will despair neither of life nor of America.

POOR ISRAEL

I returned to Washington, and then to New York, for the Republican convention. And since I had a little time to spare, I decided to spend it in Brooklyn, in effect the fourth largest city in the United States. Yes, that's something we tend to forget in Europe, and that I, in any case, am always forgetting: the city of Arthur Miller and Henry Miller, Barbra Streisand, Mel Brooks, Hubert Selby Jr., Spike Lee, the city that symbolizes (in France, at least) the vitality of American Judaism, is, with its 2.5 million inhabitants, the fourth largest city in the United States—or would be, if it had not been incorporated into New York.

Signs in Yiddish. Landscape of garages and warehouses, giving way to houses and kosher restaurants. Men in black. Tefillin. The heavy clothes, despite the summer heat. The hats, the yarmulkes, the long coats, and, for the women, the long skirts and the headscarves. Time standing still. Contemplation. Only sign of activity in this unusually silent world whose only equivalent I know is the Mea Shearim in Jerusalem: the passage, sirens wailing, of the new ambulance of the Hatzoleh, the Jewish volunteers who devote a third or a half of their week to helping people with medical emergencies.

Sitting around a long table, an assembly of rabbis; it seems to come out of a story by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Two strange characters turn up who have come, to put it bluntly, to negotiate for the support of the Orthodox Jews for President Bush.

And then, finally, the two events for which I have come. A meeting at the office of the Ohel Children's Home and Family Services, where everything from the old wood wainscoting to the black-and-white photos from the era of the pioneers of Israel—the very Warsaw-ghetto-like caps on most of the men, the cloche hats and old-fashioned makeup on the women, the people's look of having come out of a scene from Exodus, their figures, sometimes their gestures—seems to bear witness to a time gone by that here, in the midst of New York, has been mysteriously recovered. And then, at the neighboring yeshiva, on the corner of Forty-seventh Street and Sixteenth Avenue, in an even more austere setting that reminds me of the shuls of Lithuania, a meeting of the Council of Wise Men of the Torah. Sitting around a long table where an old master with a white beard is enthroned, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, Rebbe of Novominsk and spiritual leader of the Agudath Israel of America, an assembly of rabbis, very handsome, very poetic. I don't think I've ever seen

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anything like this; it seems to come out of a story by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Two strange characters turn up who have come, to put it bluntly, to negotiate for the support of the Orthodox Jews for President Bush and his camp.

One of them, Norm Coleman, Jewish, a Republican candidate for a Senate seat from Minnesota, is a sort of blond yuppie with exceedingly white teeth and the smile of a wolf.

The other is Rick Santorum, Catholic, a Republican senator from Pennsylvania. I would interview him the next day, during a break in the convention, and he would explain to me that as a Catholic he is a fervent supporter of Israel and that traditional Catholics and Orthodox Jews see God and the world in similar ways.

Thank you, Coleman begins, beneath the suspicious and faintly amused gaze of the rabbis. Thank you, not just for being here but for being, for existing ... I was born not far from here, but you embody another world ... This world is an example ... Your world is a model ... Vote for me.

Your faith, Santorum adds, even more ingratiating, desperately trying, like a child, to meet the gaze of Rabbi Perlow, who, in the big black satin coat that he won't remove during the entire meeting, his face sealed off, withdrawn, seems completely absent—your faith is my own. The example of your faith and your belonging is what helps me live and believe. Tomorrow I have to talk to a devout assembly of Christians. Well, I hope you know that when I talk to them about faith, about the power and grandeur of hope, it's you I'll be thinking about. It's your example I'll bear in mind.

And the rabbis—diffident, ironic, with an air of immense disdain, and the drifting attention of people who have seen everything, heard everything, and who observe this sales pitch from their age-old summit of history and wisdom—are silently bored, ask a few questions, consult one another with a glance, and end up saying, just like that, without insisting, without abandoning their conspicuous detachment from whatever is not, directly or indirectly, linked to their religious concerns: Well, then, since you must know, here is what our community needs for its schools, synagogues, health services, and support for Israel in its struggle against terrorism.

In this scene, in this confrontation between faith and greed, between the highest demands of the spirit and the crass indifference of fishers for votes, I don't know who should be blamed. Maybe there's no need to blame anyone, and I'm just present at one of those operations of bargaining or lobbying that are the common bill of fare of the "civic pragmatism" Tocqueville spoke of, which at least has the merit, compared with European hypocrisy, of putting its cards on the table. But there's one thing, nonetheless, I'm sure of. I have my own radar. I have my personal instrument panel on which, on a certain number of sensitive subjects, the signs that indicate the best and the worst begin to flash. Well, then: I didn't feel that Rick Santorum and Norm Coleman were the sincere friends they claimed to be, or that they would make this country an unfailing supporter of Israel. I listened to them. Observed them. I saw clearly, in each of them, the requisite consideration for a powerful, close-knit community that held a part of their political destiny in its hands. But what of a situation in which the community in question was less powerful? What of the day when another community, which makes hatred of the Jewish people the heart of its program, acquires more power? And beyond all that, what about the brilliant evangelical Protestant idea of the need to ensure a peaceful, faithful, and above all Jewish Israel for when the (Christian) Day of Judgment comes? How can one not feel that this is the very kind of argument that lasts as long as great misunderstandings last? Perhaps I'm wrong. But I wouldn't like to bet on American support for the survivors of the Shoah if it came down to depending, really depending, on an outlook of this sort.

THE RETURN OF IDEOLOGY

What is a Republican? What distinguishes a Republican in the America of today from a Democrat? Does this division of the two Americas exist, the blue and the red, the progressive and the conservative, which Barack Obama challenged but in which Jim Harrison seems to believe?

On the one hand, I keep meeting Democrats who think like Republicans and who without any qualms, without thinking for a single second of leaving their original party, go and vote for George Bush (the former mayor of New York Ed Koch, the former CIA chief James Woolsey).

In the same vein, I keep seeing Republicans who—also without a qualm, and even without understanding my surprise—go and vote for John Kerry (Ron Reagan, the son of President Reagan) or abstain (that association of conservative gay men, the Log Cabin Republicans, one of whose leaders, Chris Barron, I interviewed in Washington, who don't want to "endorse" Bush's stance in favor of a constitutional amendment that would forbid gay marriage).

On one hand, then, a novel system of membership, which has no comparison to what we know in Europe, and in which one's attachment to a party is both very strong and very pliable, extremely tenacious and in the end somewhat empty: an essentialist attachment, if you like (Koch, for instance, wouldn't renounce it at any price, and he proudly shows me, in his Fifth Avenue office overlooking his beloved New York, hanging next to sacred images of Anwar Sadat, Dizzy Gillespie, Teddy Kollek, and Mother Teresa, his photos with Hillary Clinton), yet devoid of all content and even of direction. (When I ask him what it can mean, when you vote Republican, to declare yourself a Democrat, he hesitates, becomes a little flustered, looks at the photo of Hillary as if she could whisper the answer to him, and ends up blurting out, "Stubbornness and nostalgia—a mixture of stubbornness and memory, habit and loyalty, that's all.")

But on the other hand, for three days I attended the Republican convention in New York. I listened to speeches

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given by Rudy Giuliani and Governor George Pataki. I listened to Bush. I saw Arnold Schwarzenegger tell us, with an emotion that didn't seem entirely put on, about his experience as an immigrant coming from a socialist country (sic) to discover this America that opened its arms to him. But mostly I interviewed crowds of delegates from Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, Kansas, Arkansas, each of whom I asked what being Republican and being there meant to them. And the surprise, the big surprise, is that the answers they gave me had nothing to do with the old French—but also American—cliché of a political spectacle reduced to its purely festive, playful, carnivalesque dimension, and thus without anything at stake.

Some talked to me about abortion and gay marriage. Some explained that nothing seemed more important to them than reinforcing the role of the churches or reducing the role of the urban elite. Others advocated a return to Main Street instead of Wall Street, the rehabilitation of the values of rural America as opposed to those of interventionist and cosmopolitan America, the defense of a concept of human rights that embraces the right to bear arms to defend one's freedom and property. For others, hatred of the Clintons was a good enough reason. And for still others, the senator from Massachusetts and his plutocrat wife, Teresa, were embodiments of a France that was likened to an uneasy mixture of "femininity," "decadent immorality," "snobbish intellectualism," and "chic radicalism."

BARRY LEWIS / NETWORK PHOTOGRAPHERS

The big surprise at the convention is that the way delegates talked to me about the issues had nothing to do with the old French—but also American—cliché of a political spectacle reduced to its purely carnivalesque dimension, and thus without anything at stake.

You can think what you like about these issues. You can deem them naive, retrograde, indefensible, contradictory. You can find it amusing to hear the same virtuous people condemning Teresa's millions and defending, in the same breath, the hedge funds against the welfare state. But what you can't say is that it's a question of a weak or half-hearted position. Or one that's purely pragmatic, and reduces the ideal government of the United States to a glorified board of directors. What you can't claim is that you were present here at one more bazaar, another level of the circus, a second summit of the same nihilism that offers its two symmetrically standard Democratic and Republican versions. What you can't argue without bad faith is that between the position of these people and that of the delegates in Boston who gave standing ovations to Howard Dean and Senator Ted Kennedy there is no difference in content or ideology.

For you can take that word, "ideology," in whatever sense you like. You can understand it in the ordinary sense of a representation of the world. You can understand it in the sense of an illusion that conceals from people the reality of their situation. You can think about the grand philosophical "systems" and other "utopias" that Tocqueville thought Americans "mistrusted." Or, on the contrary, you can think of this mania for "general causes," this submission to ideas and broad social forces that act "on so many men's faculties at once"—a tendency, he warns, that can paralyze individuals and societies. We have reached that point. These people who say "values matter more"; these activists for whom the struggle against Darwin is a sacred cause that should be argued in the schools; this blue-collar man from Buffalo to whom I explain that the promise of the current president to reduce federal taxes will have the automatic effect of impoverishing his native city even more, who replies that he couldn't care less, because what matters to him is the problem posed by inflation in a quasi-Soviet state. These are men and women who are ready to let the questions that affect them most directly take second place to matters of principle that—in the case, for instance, of the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts—do not have, and never will have, any effect on their concrete existence. Aren't they reacting as ideologues would, according to criteria that have to be called ideological?

A curious affair. And a curious reversal. It surprises me as a Frenchman, coming from a country that has lived under the rule of ideological passion brought to white heat—and yet has recovered from it. But I can clearly see that it is all the more disconcerting to the most careful analysts of the evolution of a society in which each person's appreciation of the just dividends he can get from the social contract seems to be the first and last word in politics. What's the matter with Kansas? Since when has politics stopped obeying the honest calculation of self-interest and personal ambition? How can knowledgeable, reasonable, pragmatic men work for their own servitude, thinking they're struggling for their freedom? That, Thomas Frank, is what is called ideology. That is precisely the mechanism that La Boétie and Karl Marx described in Europe, which we, alas, have experienced only too often. Now it's your turn, friends. And as we say in France, *À votre santé*!—To your very good health!

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On Becoming American

As we were waiting for the cameras to roll in a Washington studio just before Christmas, my *faux bonhomme* host, Pat Buchanan, inquired offhandedly as to my citizenship and residency status. I innocently told him that my paperwork for naturalization was in the system, but that Homeland Security had racked up an immense backlog of applications. Then up came the music for the next segment—which was to be about the display of religious symbols on public land—and before I knew it, Buchanan was demanding to know by what right I, a foreign atheist, could presume to come over here and lecture Americans about their Christian heritage.

Synthetic outrage is *de rigueur* in the world of American cable-TV news, and I was almost as surprised by the authenticity of my own fury as I had been by the extreme inexpensiveness of Buchanan's ambush. More than two decades in Washington—and all that time beseeched by Buchanan to be a guest! Three children born in the country, and all three as American as the day is long! An unblemished record of compliance with boring correspondence from the IRS! As the blush of anger left my cheek, however, I dimly realized that I was not resentful of Buchanan's abuse of his own hypocritical hospitality. Rather, I felt that my very own hearth was being profaned. Don't be telling me to go home, big boy. I *am* home.

Seething a little more in the limo that bore me away, I understood why I had not even thought of one possible riposte: "Don't you take that tone with me, you German-Irish fascist windbag. I don't have to justify my presence to riffraff like you. Tell it to Father Coughlin and Charles Lindbergh—and meanwhile, don't stab our boys in Iraq in the back." Had I said that, or anything like it, I would truly have been sorry, at the time as well as later. (On the other hand, I shall always covertly wish I *had* said it—though had I done so, the prefix to "bag" would not have been "wind." One hopes to keep one's well of meticulous English pure and undefiled; but then again, there's no demotic abuse like American demotic abuse.)

In writing a biography of President Clinton, who was our contemporary at Oxford, my English friend and colleague Martin Walker had some success with a book titled *The President We Deserve*. The volume was also published in London, with the no less eloquent title *The President They Deserve*. I had just completed work on a short biography of another president, Thomas Jefferson, and had found myself referring in the closing passages to "our" republic and "our" Constitution. I didn't even notice that I had done this until I came to review the pages in final proof. What does it take for an immigrant to shift from "you" to "we"?

No loyalty oath, no coerced allegiance, was involved. In the course of writing thousands of columns and making hundreds of media and podium appearances, many of them highly critical of the government of the day, I had almost never been asked by what right I did so. My offspring were Americans just by virtue of being born here (no other country in the world is or has ever been this generous). As soon as I got my green card, immigration officers started saying "welcome home" when I passed through. Moreover, as one who is incompetent to do anything save writing and speaking, I stood under the great roof of the First Amendment and did not have to think (as I once had to think) of the libel laws and the other grand and petty restraints that oppress my craft in the country of my birth.

But this wasn't my thinking. Anyone who has read this far may already be muttering, "Easy for *you* to say. English-speaking. White. Oxford-educated." Semi-consciously, I had been thinking the same way. *You're lucky enough as it is, and anyway who will ever mistake you for anything but a Brit?* Yet osmosis was at work somehow, or so I must now suppose, and when it came to a critical point, it did so in the form I would most have wanted to resist: namely, that of a cliché. For me, September 11, 2001, really did "change everything." In exploring the non-clichéd but most literal forms of that observation, and its ramifications, I began to read the press—the American press—as if it were held up to some kind of mirror. Each time I was instructed that such-and-such a fatuity was the view of "the Europeans," I decided not that my Anglo-Celtic-Polish-German-Jewish heritage was being parodied (though it was) but that someone whose claim to be "European" was at least as good as M. Chirac's should assure his American friends that they need not feel unsophisticated or embarrassed. *Au contraire* ...

One cannot hope or expect to keep such a feeling—which I claim is of the mind as well as of the heart—within bounds. I had lived in the nation's capital for many years, and never particularly liked it. But when it was exposed to attack, and looked and felt so goddamn vulnerable, I fused myself with it. I know now that no solvent can ever unglue that bond. And yes, before you ask, I could easily name Arabs, Iranians, Greeks, Mexicans, and others who felt precisely as I did, and who communicated it almost wordlessly. I tried my hardest in 2001 to express it in words all the same. The best I could do was to say that in America your internationalism can and should be your patriotism. I still rather like the clumsiness of what I said. In finishing my Jefferson book I concluded more sententiously that the American Revolution is the only revolution that still resonates. I suppose I could narrow this a bit and add that the strenuously nativist and isolationist Pat Buchanan still strikes me, as he always did, as chronically un-American. —*CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS*

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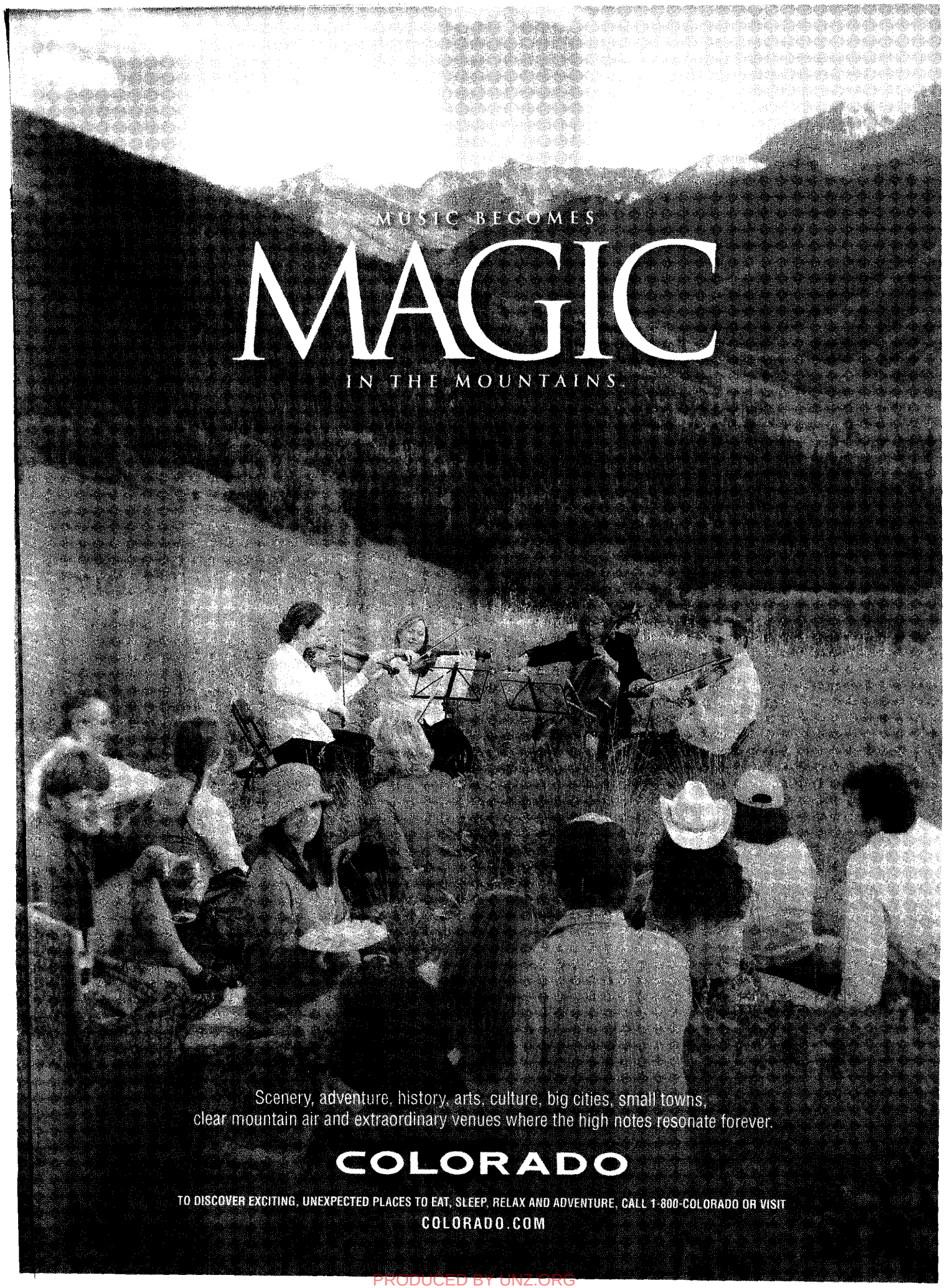

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THE COMING DEATH SHORTAGE

Why the longevity boom will make us sorry to be alive

BY CHARLES C. MANN

Illustration by Edward Sorel

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Anna Nicole Smith's role as a harbinger of the future is not widely acknowledged. Born Vickie Lynn Hogan, Smith first came to the attention of the American public in 1993, when she earned the title Playmate of the Year. In 1994 she married J. Howard Marshall, a Houston oil magnate said to be worth more than half a billion dollars. He was eighty-nine and wheelchair-bound; she was twenty-six and quiveringly mobile. Fourteen months later Marshall died. At his funeral the widow appeared in a white dress with a vertical neckline. She also claimed that Marshall had promised half his fortune to her. The inevitable litigation sprawled from Texas to California and occupied batteries of lawyers, consultants, and public-relations specialists for more than seven years.

Even before Smith appeared, Marshall had disinherited his older son. And he had infuriated his younger son by lavishing millions on a mistress, an exotic dancer, who then died in a bizarre face-lift accident. To block Marshall senior from squandering on Smith money that Marshall junior regarded as rightfully his, the son seized control of his father's assets by means that the trial judge later said were so "egregious," "malicious," and "fraudulent" that he regretted being unable to fine the younger Marshall more than $44 million in punitive damages.

In its epic tawdriness the Marshall affair was natural fodder for the tabloid media. Yet one aspect of it may soon seem less a freak show than a cliché. If an increasingly influential group of researchers is correct, the lurid spectacle of intergenerational warfare will become a typical social malady.

The scientists' argument is circuitous but not complex. In the past century U.S. life expectancy has climbed from forty-seven to seventy-seven, increasing by nearly two thirds. Similar rises happened in almost every country. And this process shows no sign of stopping: according to the United Nations, by 2050 global life expectancy will have increased by another ten years. Note, however, that this tremendous increase has been in *average* life expectancy—that is, the number of years that most people live. There has been next to no increase in the *maximum* lifespan, the number of years that one can possibly walk the earth—now thought to be about 120. In the scientists' projections, the ongoing increase in average lifespan is about to be joined by something never before seen in human history: a rise in the maximum possible age at death.

Stem-cell banks, telomerase amplifiers, somatic gene therapy—the list of potential longevity treatments incubating in laboratories is startling. Three years ago a multi-institutional scientific team led by Aubrey de Grey, a theoretical geneticist at Cambridge University, argued in a widely noted paper that the first steps toward "engineered negligible senescence"—a rough-and-ready version of immortality—would have "a good chance of success in mice within ten years." The same techniques, De Grey says, should be ready for human beings a decade or so later. "In ten years we'll have a pill that will give you twenty years," says Leonard Guarente, a professor of biology at MIT. "And then there'll be another pill after that. The first hundred-and-fifty-year-old may have already been born."

Critics regard such claims as wildly premature. In March ten respected researchers predicted in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that "the steady rise in life expectancy during the past two centuries may soon come to an end," because rising levels of obesity are making people sicker. The research team leader, S. Jay Olshansky, of the University of Illinois School of Public Health, also worries about the "potential impact of infectious disease." Believing that medicine can and will overcome these problems, his "cautious and I think defensibly optimistic estimate" is that the average lifespan will reach eighty-five or ninety—in 2100. Even this relatively slow rate of increase, he says, will radically alter the underpinnings of human existence. "Pushing the outer limits of lifespan" will force the world to confront a situation no society has ever faced before: an acute shortage of dead people.

Charles C. Mann is an Atlantic *correspondent. His book* 1491, *which grew out of his April 2002* Atlantic *cover story, will be published in August.*

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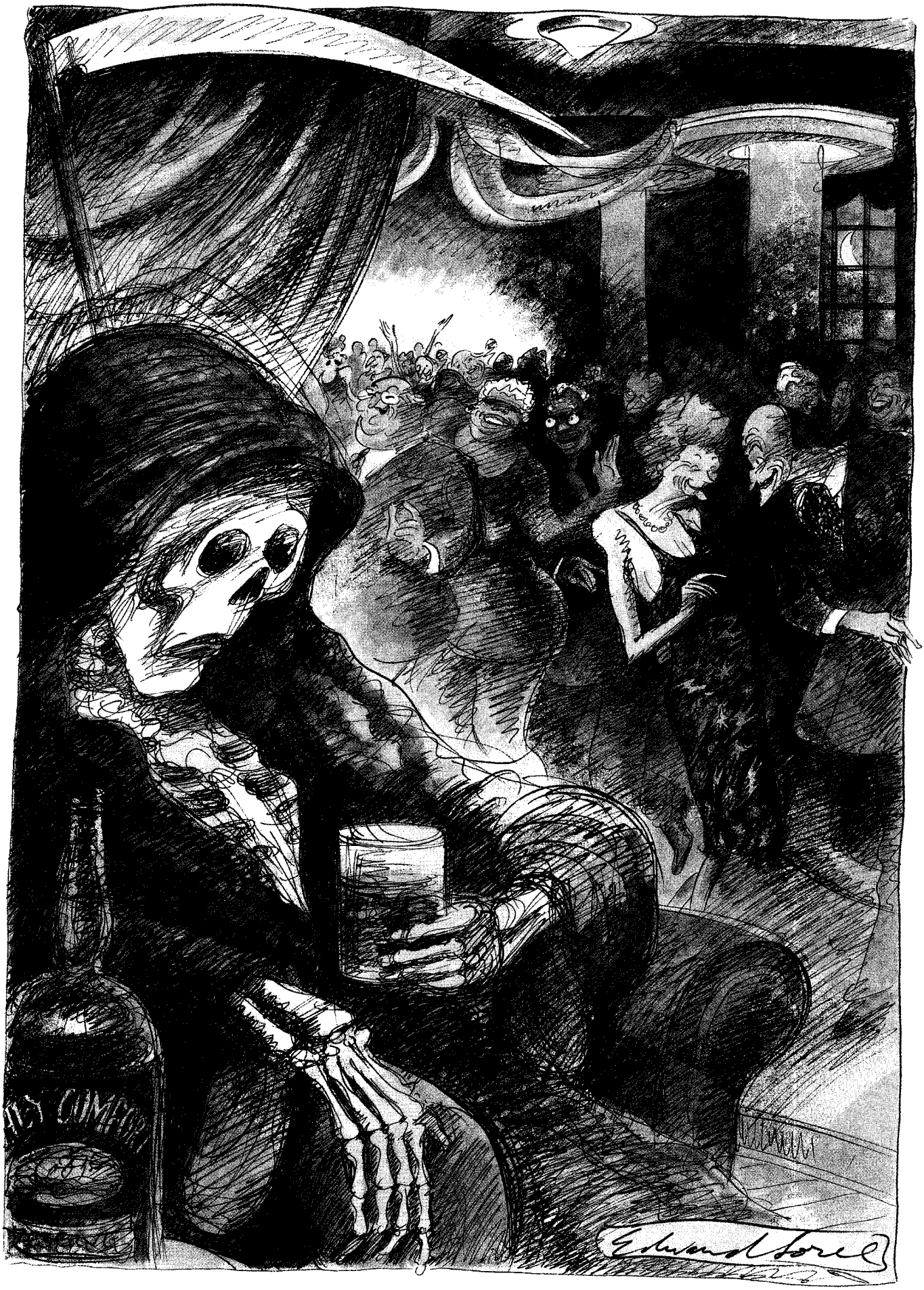

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The twentieth-century jump in life expectancy transformed society. Fifty years ago senior citizens were not a force in electoral politics. Now the AARP is widely said to be the most powerful organization in Washington. Medicare, Social Security, retirement, Alzheimer's, snowbird economies, the population boom, the golfing boom, the cosmetic-surgery boom, the nostalgia boom, the recreational-vehicle boom, Viagra—increasing longevity is entangled in every one. Momentous as these changes have been, though, they will pale before what is coming next.

Instead of helping their juniors begin careers and families, tomorrow's rich oldsters will be expending their disposable income to enhance their memories, senses, and immune systems, refashioning their flesh to ever higher levels of performance.

From religion to real estate, from pensions to parent-child dynamics, almost every aspect of society is based on the orderly succession of generations. Every quarter century or so children take over from their parents—a transition as fundamental to human existence as the rotation of the planet about its axis. In tomorrow's world, if the optimists are correct, grandparents will have living grandparents; children born decades from now will ignore advice from people who watched the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Intergenerational warfare—the Anna Nicole Smith syndrome—will be but one consequence. Trying to envision such a world, sober social scientists find themselves discussing pregnant seventy-year-olds, offshore organ farms, protracted adolescence, and lifestyles policed by insurance companies. Indeed, if the biologists are right, the coming army of centenarians will be marching into a future so unutterably different that they may well feel nostalgia for the long-ago days of three score and ten.

The oldest *in vitro* fertilization clinic in China is located on the sixth floor of a no-star hotel in Changsha, a gritty fly-over city in the south-central portion of the country. It is here that the clinic's founder and director, Lu Guangxiu, pursues her research into embryonic stem cells.

Most cells *don't* divide, whatever elementary school students learn—they just get old and die. The body subcontracts out the job of replacing them to a special class of cells called stem cells. Embryonic stem cells—those in an early-stage embryo—can grow into any kind of cell: spleen, nerve, bone, whatever. Rather than having to wait for a heart transplant, medical researchers believe, a patient could use stem cells to grow a new heart: organ transplant without an organ donor.

The process of extracting stem cells destroys an early-stage embryo, which has led the Bush administration to place so many strictures on stem-cell research that scientists complain it has been effectively banned in this country. A visit to Lu's clinic not long ago suggested that ultimately Bush's rules won't stop anything. Capitalism won't let them.

During a conversation Lu accidentally brushed some papers to the floor. They were faxes from venture capitalists in San Francisco, Hong Kong, and Stuttgart. "I get those all the time," she said. Her operation was short of money—a chronic problem for scientists in poor countries. But it had something of value: thousands of frozen embryos, an inevitable by-product of *in vitro* fertilizations. After obtaining permission from patients, Lu uses the embryos in her work. It is possible that she has access to more embryonic stem cells than all U.S. researchers combined.

Sooner or later, in one nation or another, someone like Lu will cut a deal: frozen embryos for financial backing. Few are the stem-cell researchers who believe that their work will not lead to tissue-and-organ farms, and that these will not have a dramatic impact on the human lifespan. If Organs 'R' Us is banned in the United States, Americans will fly to longevity centers elsewhere. As Steve Hall wrote in *Merchants of Immortality*, biotechnology increasingly resembles the software industry. Dependence on venture capital, loathing of regulation, pathological secretiveness, penchant for hype, willingness to work overseas—they're all there. Already the U.S. Patent Office has issued 400 patents concerning human stem cells.

Longevity treatments will almost certainly drive up medical costs, says Dana Goldman, the director of health economics at the RAND Corporation, and some might drive them up significantly. Implanted defibrillators, for example, could constantly monitor people's hearts for signs of trouble, electrically regulating the organs when they miss a beat. Researchers believe that the devices would reduce heart-disease deaths significantly. At the same time, Goldman says, they would by themselves drive up the nation's health-care costs by "many billions of dollars" (Goldman and his colleagues are working on nailing down how much), and they would be only one of many new medical interventions. In developed nations antiretroviral drugs for AIDS typically cost about $15,000 a year. According to James Lubitz, the acting chief of the aging and chronic-disease statistics branch of the CDC National Center for Health Statistics, there is no a priori reason to suppose that lifespan extension will be cheaper, that the treatments will have to be administered less frequently, or that their inventors will agree to be less well compensated. To be sure, as Ramez Naam points out in *More Than Human*, which surveys the prospects for "biological enhancement," drugs inevitably fall in price as their patents expire. But the same does not necessarily hold true for medical procedures: heart bypass operations are still costly, decades after their invention. And in any case there will invariably be newer, more effective,

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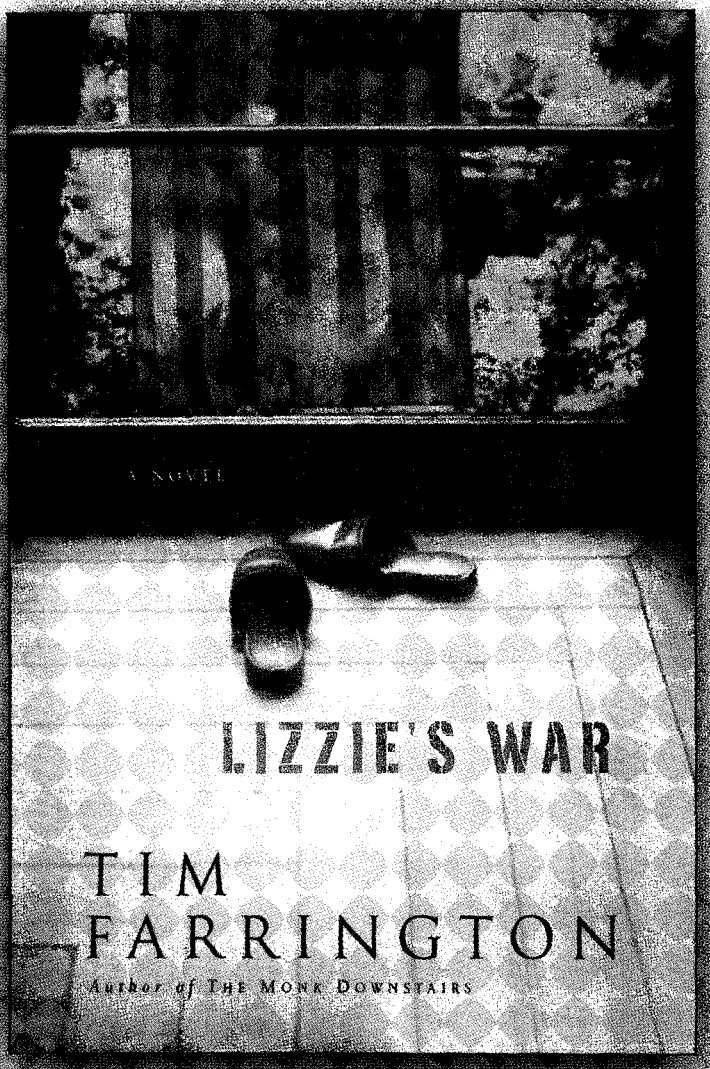
Booksellers are Buzzing about the new novel from Tim Farrington

"Farrington gives us heartwrenchingly believable characters in this entertaining and moving saga of a young family during the Vietnam War. An emotional and darkly humorous read!"
—Carol Schneck,
Schuler Books, Okemos, MI

"Farrington bests the much-beloved *The Monk Downstairs* with his new novel about a married couple separated by the Vietnam War. The writing sparkles, the period details are spot on, and the story of the separated couple bound both by love and faith packs an emotional heft."
—Daniel Goldin,
Harry W. Schwartz Bookshops, Milwaukee, WI

"I adored *The Monk Downstairs* and am thrilled [Farrington] has written an even stronger, deeper novel with this new one. One of the loveliest aspects of this novel is how it functions as a model for a working relationship, a relationship fraught with stresses and misunderstandings and tragedy and yet endures. [A] fabulous novel."
—Margaret Simpson,
A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books, San Francisco, CA

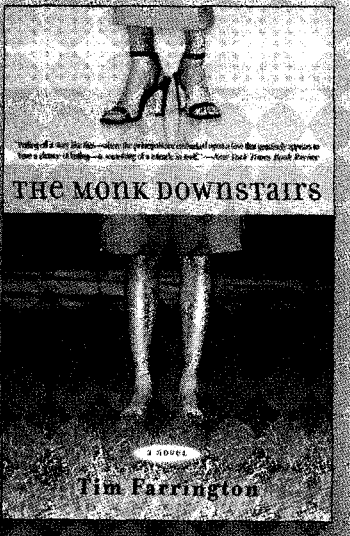


"This book is both heartwarming and heartwrenching. Get ready for high antics from a couple sets of Marine family children as they and their parents deal with the fathers being in Vietnam."
—Lesley Bodemann,
Joseph-Beth, Lexington, KY

"A beautiful novel that is a reminder that Vietnam was a war fought on two fronts—the bloody and baffling war in Southeast Asia and the war at home of protest and civil unrest. A strong and moving novel about faith, faithfulness, and love."
—Lyn Roberts,
Square Books, Oxford, MS

"Wonderful ... *Lizzie's War* is the sort of book you fall into, and emerge a few days later, a bit stunned, and saddened because the story ends long before you are ready to let go of the characters. There is not one false note, and all the characters, however marginal, manage to be fully drawn ... Farrington is a gifted writer who takes on some enormous topics with grace and wisdom."
—Leslie Reiner,
Inkwood Books, Tampa, FL

"*Lizzie's War* ... [is] a war story that doesn't exclude women and a relationship story that won't freak out men. It's about people who take their work seriously, whether that's being a mother, a priest, or a soldier, and performing that work as best they can when circumstance or current political climate make it hard as hell. Usually I finish a book and pick up the next one immediately ... With *Lizzie's War*, I had to spend time with it for a few hours, cogitating and digesting."
—Sydne Waller,
Chapter 11, Atlanta, GA



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and more costly drugs. Simple arithmetic shows that if 80 million U.S. senior citizens were to receive $15,000 worth of treatment every year, the annual cost to the nation would be $1.2 trillion—"the kind of number," Lubitz says, "that gets people's attention."

The potential costs are enormous, but the United States is a rich nation. As a share of gross domestic product the cost of U.S. health care roughly doubled from 1980 to the present, explains David M. Cutler, a health-care economist at Harvard. Yet unlike many cost increases, this one signifies that people are better off. "Would you rather have a heart attack with 1980 medicine at the 1980 price?" Cutler asks. "We get more and better treatments now, and we pay more for the additional services. I don't look at that and see an obvious disaster."

The critical issue, in Goldman's view, will be not the costs per se but determining who will pay them. "We're going to have a very public debate about whether this will be covered by insurance," he says. "My sense is that it won't. It'll be like cosmetic surgery—you pay out of pocket." Necessarily, a pay-as-you-go policy would limit access to longevity treatments. If high-level anti-aging therapy were expensive enough, it could become a perk for movie stars, politicians, and CEOs. One can envision Michael Moore fifty years from now, still denouncing the rich in political tracts delivered through the next generation's version of the Internet—neural implants, perhaps. Donald Trump, a 108-year-old multibillionaire in 2054, will be firing the children of the apprentices he fired in 2004. Meanwhile, the maids, chauffeurs, and gofers of the rich will stare mortality in the face.

Short of overtly confiscating rich people's assets, it would be hard to avoid this divide. Yet as Goldman says, there will be "furious" political pressure to avert the worst inequities. For instance, government might mandate that insurance cover longevity treatments. In fact, it is hard to imagine any democratic government foolhardy enough *not* to guarantee access to those treatments, especially when the old are increasing in number and political clout. But forcing insurers to cover longevity treatments would only change the shape of the social problem. "Most everyone will want to take [the treatment]," Goldman says. "So that jacks up the price of insurance, which leads to more people uninsured. Either way, we may be bifurcating society."

Ultimately, Goldman suggests, the government would probably end up paying outright for longevity treatments: an enormous new entitlement program. How could it be otherwise? Older voters would want it because it is in their interest; younger ones would want it because they, too, will age. "At the same time," he says, "nobody likes paying taxes, so there would be constant pressure to contain costs."

To control spending, the program might give priority to people with healthy habits; no point in retooling the genomes of smokers, risk takers, and addicts of all kinds. A kind of reverse eugenics might occur, in which governments would freely allow the birth of people with "bad" genes but would let nature take its course on them as they aged. Having shed the baggage of depression, addiction, mental retardation, and chemical-sensitivity syndrome, tomorrow's legions of perduring old would be healthier than the young. In this scenario moralists and reformers would have a field day.

Meanwhile, the gerontocratic elite will have a supreme weapon against the young: compound interest. According to a 2004 study by three researchers at the London Business School, historically the average rate of real return on stock markets worldwide has been about five percent. Thus a twenty-year-old who puts $10,000 in the market in 2010 should expect by 2030 to have about $27,000 in real terms—a

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WYSSA

Antarctica, 1961

Compressed for Morse, compressed to better the odds
this first, flimsy signal might send sense across ocean
unbroken, I type just WYSSA, which you know means
all my love, darling in this telegraph of foreseen
longing. In further news, YIHKE—*I have grown*

a beard which is generally admired, and with it
will tease the soft hollow between your hip bones
as you lie in the green field beyond our gate, or,
if you dislike the beard, I will lay my head in your lap
and let you cut it from me, cut away my months gone

and burn them, acrid and bitter. WUYGT—*elephant seals are breeding*, and although their heaving is nothing like
our shadows against cabbage-rose wallpaper, I am
aroused. They are the only flesh here, and they slap
against each other with unrelenting fervor. YOGIP—

please send details of bank account. Do you have
enough? Has my time here at least fattened something?
Can I afford to say WYSSA again? YAYIR—*fine snow has penetrated through small crevices in the buildings.*
I am cold. And although we decided this code

with your breath still against my neck, your heat
anything but distant, believe that my heart's capacity
has, if anything, expanded in this chill. YONOY—
from now on, all I hammer against the sounding metal
of this small machine is WYSSA. All of it.

—ELIZABETH BRADFIELD

Elizabeth Bradfield holds an M.F.A. from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She currently works as a naturalist and a writing instructor.

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THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY
is pleased to announce the following
prizewinners in the 2004

STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Fiction

1st Prize
Misty Urban
Cornell University

2nd Prize
Karen Russell
Columbia University

3rd Prize
Kanishk Tharoor
Yale University

Honorable Mention
Hugh Eberly
University of Alabama

Scott Loring Sanders
Hollins University

Chad Simpson
Southern Illinois
University Carbondale

Reese Kwon
Yale University

Keya Mitra
University of Houston

Sharon Thatcher
Boise State University

Robert Liddell
University of Houston

Poetry

1st Prize
Alexander Nemser
Yale University

2nd Prize
Christine Poreba
University of Florida

3rd Prize
Courtney Queeney
Syracuse University

Honorable Mention
Dawn Lonsinger
Cornell University

William Merrell
Columbia University

Adrian Khactu
Temple University

Jehanne Dubrow
University of
Nebraska Lincoln

Jenny Wallenfels
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Britta Arneel
University of Michigan

Carey McHugh
Columbia University

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1st Prize
Jeremy Kutner
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2nd Prize
Kyle Minor
Ohio State University

3rd Prize
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Yale University

Sean Prentiss
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tidy increase. But that happy forty-year-old will be in the same world as septuagenarians and octogenarians who began investing their money during the Carter administration. If someone who turned seventy in 2010 had invested $10,000 when he was twenty, he would have about $115,000. In the same twenty-year period during which the young person's account grew from $10,000 to $27,000, the old person's account would grow from $115,000 to $305,000. Inexorably, the gap between them will widen.

The result would be a tripartite society: the very old and very rich on top, beta-testing each new treatment on themselves; a mass of the ordinary old, forced by insurance into supremely healthy habits, kept alive by medical entitlement; and the diminishingly influential young. In his novel *Holy Fire* (1996) the science-fiction writer and futurist Bruce Sterling conjured up a version of this dictatorship-by-actuary: a society in which the cautious, careful centenarian rulers, supremely fit and disproportionately affluent if a little frail, look down with ennui and mild contempt on their juniors. Marxist class warfare, upgraded to the biotech era!

Increased longevity may add to marital strains. The historian Lawrence Stone noted that divorce was rare in previous centuries partly because people died so young that bad unions were often dissolved by early funerals.

In the past, twenty- and thirty-year-olds had the chance of sudden windfalls in the form of inheritances. Some economists believe that bequests from previous generations have provided as much as a quarter of the start-up capital for each new one—money for college tuitions, new houses, new businesses. But the image of an ingénue's getting a leg up through a sudden bequest from Aunt Tilly will soon be a relic of late-millennium romances.

Instead of helping their juniors begin careers and families, tomorrow's rich oldsters will be expending their disposable income to enhance their memories, senses, and immune systems. Refashioning their flesh to ever higher levels of performance, they will adjust their metabolisms on computers, install artificial organs that synthesize smart drugs, and swallow genetically tailored bacteria and viruses that clean out arteries, fine-tune neurons, and repair broken genes. Should one be reminded of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, in which humankind is divided into two species, the ethereal Eloi and the brutish, underground-dwelling Morlocks? "As I recall," Goldman told me recently, "in that book it didn't work out very well for the Eloi."

When lifespans extend indefinitely, the effects are felt throughout the life cycle, but the biggest social impact may be on the young. According to Joshua Goldstein, a demographer at Princeton, adolescence will in the future evolve into a period of experimentation and education that will last from the teenage years into the mid-thirties. In a kind of *wanderjahr* prolonged for decades, young people will try out jobs on a temporary basis, float in and out of their parents' homes, hit the Europass-and-hostel circuit, pick up extra courses and degrees, and live with different people in different places. In the past the transition from youth to adulthood usually followed an orderly sequence: education, entry into the labor force, marriage, and parenthood. For tomorrow's thirtysomethings, suspended in what Goldstein calls "quasi-adulthood," these steps may occur in any order.

From our short-life-expectancy point of view, quasi-adulthood may seem like a period of socially mandated fecklessness—what Leon Kass, the chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, has decried as the coming culture of "protracted youthfulness, hedonism, and sexual license." In Japan, ever in the demographic forefront, as many as one out of three young adults is either unemployed or working part-time, and many are living rent-free with their parents. Masahiro Yamada, a sociologist at Tokyo Gakugei University, has sarcastically dubbed them *parasaito shinguru*, or "parasite singles." Adult offspring who live with their parents are common in aging Europe, too. In 2003 a report from the British Prudential financial-services group awarded the 6.8 million British in this category the mocking name of "kippers"—"kids in parents' pockets eroding retirement savings."

To Kass, the main cause of this stasis is "the successful pursuit of longer life and better health." Kass's fulminations easily lend themselves to ridicule. Nonetheless, he is in many ways correct. According to Yuji Genda, an economist at Tokyo University, the drifty lives of parasite singles are indeed a by-product of increased longevity, mainly because longer-lived seniors are holding on to their jobs. Japan, with the world's oldest population, has the highest percentage of working senior citizens of any developed nation: one out of three men over sixty-five is still on the job. Everyone in the nation, Genda says, is "tacitly aware" that the old are "blocking the door."

In a world of 200-year-olds "the rate of rise in income and status perhaps for the first hundred years of life will be almost negligible," the crusty maverick economist Kenneth Boulding argued in a prescient article from 1965. "It is the propensity of the old, rich, and powerful to die that gives the young, poor, and powerless hope." (Boulding died in 1993, opening up a position for another crusty maverick economist.)

Kass believes that "human beings, once they have attained the burdensome knowledge of good and bad, should not have access to the tree of life." Accordingly, he has proposed a straightforward way to prevent the problems of youth in a society dominated by the old: "resist the siren song of the

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conquest of aging and death." Senior citizens, in other words, should let nature take its course once humankind's biblical seventy-year lifespan is up. Unfortunately, this solution is self-canceling, since everyone who agrees with it is eventually eliminated. Opponents, meanwhile, live on and on. Kass, who is sixty-six, has another four years to make his case.

Increased longevity may add to marital strains. The historian Lawrence Stone was among the first to note that divorce was rare in previous centuries partly because people died so young that bad unions were often dissolved by early funerals. As people lived longer, Stone argued, divorce became "a functional substitute for death." Indeed, marriages dissolved at about the same rate in 1860 as in 1960, except that in the nineteenth century the dissolution was more often due to the death of a partner, and in the twentieth century to divorce. The corollary that children were as likely to live in households without both biological parents in 1860 as in 1960 is also true. Longer lifespans are far from the only reason for today's higher divorce rates, but the evidence seems clear that they play a role. The prospect of spending another twenty years sitting across the breakfast table from a spouse whose charm has faded must have already driven millions to divorce lawyers. Adding an extra decade or two can only exacerbate the strain.

Worse, child-rearing, a primary marital activity, will be even more difficult than it is now. For the past three decades, according to Ben J. Wattenberg, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, birth rates around the world have fallen sharply as women have taken advantage of increased opportunities for education and work outside the home. "More education, more work, lower fertility," he says. The title of Wattenberg's latest book, published in October, sums up his view of tomorrow's demographic prospects: *Fewer*. In his analysis, women's continuing movement outside the home will lead to a devastating population crash—the mirror image of the population boom that shaped so much of the past century. Increased longevity will only add to the downward pressure on birth rates, by making childbearing even more difficult. During their twenties, as Goldstein's quasi-adults, men and women will be unmarried and relatively poor. In their thirties and forties they will finally grow old enough to begin meaningful careers—the worst time to have children. Waiting still longer will mean entering the maelstrom of reproductive technology, which seems likely to remain expensive, alienating, and prone to complications. Thus the parental paradox: increased longevity means *less* time for pregnancy and child-rearing, not more.

Even when women manage to fit pregnancy into their careers, they will spend a smaller fraction of their lives raising children than ever before. In the mid nineteenth century white women in the United States had a life expectancy of about forty years and typically bore five or six children. (I specify Caucasians because records were not kept for African-Americans.) These women literally spent more than half their lives caring for offspring. Today U.S. white women have a life expectancy of nearly eighty and bear an average of 1.9 children—below replacement level. If a woman spaces two births close together, she may spend only a quarter of her days in the company of offspring under the age of eighteen. Children will become ever briefer parentheses in long, crowded adult existences. It seems inevitable that the bonds between generations will fray.

Purely from a financial standpoint, parenthood has always been a terrible deal. Mom and Dad fed, clothed, housed, and educated the kids, but received little in the way of tangible return. Ever since humankind began acquiring property, wealth has flowed from older generations to younger ones. Even in those societies where children herded cattle and tilled the land for their aged progenitors, the older generation consumed so little and died off so quickly that the net movement of assets and services was always downward. "Of all the misconceptions that should be banished from discussions of aging," F. Landis MacKellar, an economist at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, in Austria, wrote in the journal *Population and Development Review* in 2001, "the most persistent and egregious is that in some simpler and more virtuous age children supported their parents."

This ancient pattern changed at the beginning of the twentieth century, when government pension and social-security schemes spread across Europe and into the Americas. Within the family parents still gave much more than they received, according to MacKellar, but under the new state plans the children in effect banded together outside the family and collectively reimbursed the parents. In the United States workers pay less to Social Security than they eventually receive; retirees are subsidized by the contributions of younger workers. But on the broadest level financial support from the young is still offset by the movement of assets within families—a point rarely noted by critics of "greedy geezers."

Increased longevity will break up this relatively equitable arrangement. Here concerns focus less on the superrich than on middle-class senior citizens, those who aren't surfing the crest of compound interest. These people will face a Hobson's choice. On the one hand, they will be unable to retire at sixty-five, because the young would end up bankrupting themselves to support them—a reason why many would-be reformers propose raising the retirement age. On the other hand, it will not be feasible for most of tomorrow's nonagenarians and centenarians to stay at their desks, no matter how fit and healthy they are.

The case against early retirement is well known. In economic jargon the ratio of retirees to workers is known as the "dependency ratio," because through pension and Social Security payments people who are now in the work force funnel money to people who have left it. A widely cited analysis by three economists at the Organization

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for Economic Cooperation and Development estimated that in 2000 the overall dependency ratio in the United States was 21.7 retirees for every 100 workers, meaning (roughly speaking) that everyone older than sixty-five had five younger workers contributing to his pension. By 2050 the dependency ratio will have almost doubled, to 38 per 100; that is, each retiree will be supported by slightly more than two current workers. If old-age benefits stay the same, in other words, the burden on younger workers, usually in the form of taxes, will more than double.

This may be an underestimate. The OECD analysis did not assume any dramatic increase in longevity, or the creation of any entitlement program to pay for longevity care. If both occur, as gerontological optimists predict, the number of old will skyrocket, as will the cost of maintaining them. To adjust to these "very bad fiscal effects," says the OECD economist Pablo Antolin, one of the report's co-authors, societies have only two choices: "raising the retirement age or cutting the benefits." He continues, "This is arithmetic—it can't be avoided." The recent passage of a huge new prescription-drug program by an administration and Congress dominated by the "party of small government" suggests that benefits will not be cut. Raising the age of retirement might be more feasible politically, but it would lead to a host of new problems—see today's Japan.

Novelist Bruce Sterling conjured up a vision of dictatorship-by-actuary: a society in which the cautious, careful centenarian rulers, supremely fit and disproportionately affluent if a little frail, look down with mild contempt on their juniors.

In the classic job pattern, salaries rise steadily with seniority. Companies underpay younger workers and overpay older workers as a means of rewarding employees who stay at their jobs. But as people have become more likely to shift firms and careers, the pay increases have become powerful disincentives for companies to retain employees in their fifties and sixties. Employers already worried about the affordability of older workers are not likely to welcome calls to raise the retirement age; the last thing they need is to keep middle managers around for another twenty or thirty years. "There will presumably be an elite group of super-rich who would be immune to all these pressures," Ronald Lee, an economic demographer at the University of California at Berkeley, says. "Nobody will kick Bill Gates out of Microsoft as long as he owns it. But there will be a lot of pressure on the average old person to get out."

In Lee's view, the financial downsizing need not be inhumane. One model is the university, which shifted older professors to emeritus status, reducing their workload in exchange for reduced pay. Or, rather, the university *could* be a model: age-discrimination litigation and professors' unwillingness to give up their perks, Lee says, have largely torpedoed the system. "It's hard to reduce someone's salary when they are older," he says. "For the person, it's viewed as a kind of disgrace. As a culture we need to get rid of that idea."

The Pentagon has released few statistics about the hundreds or thousands of insurgents captured in Afghanistan and Iraq, but one can be almost certain that they are disproportionately young. Young people have ever been in the forefront of political movements of all stripes. University students protested Vietnam, took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran, filled Tiananmen Square, served as the political vanguard for the Taliban. "When we are forty," the young writer Filippo Marinetti promised in the 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*, "other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen!"

The same holds true in business and science. Steve Jobs and Stephen Wozniak founded Apple in their twenties; Albert Einstein dreamed up special relativity at about the same age. For better and worse, young people in developed nations will have less chance to shake things up in tomorrow's world. Poorer countries, where the old have less access to longevity treatments, will provide more opportunity, political and financial. As a result, according to Fred C. Iklé, an analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "it is not fanciful to imagine a new cleavage opening up in the world order." On one side would be the "'bioengineered' nations," societies dominated by the "becalmed temperament" of old people. On the other side would be the legions of youth—"the protagonists," as the political theorist Samuel Huntington has described them, "of protest, instability, reform, and revolution."

Because poorer countries would be less likely to be dominated by a gerontocracy, tomorrow's divide between old and young would mirror the contemporary division between rich northern nations and their poorer southern neighbors. But the consequences might be different—unpredictably so. One assumes, for instance, that the dictators who hold sway in Africa and the Middle East would not hesitate to avail themselves of longevity treatments, even if few others in their societies could afford them. Autocratic figures like Arafat, Franco, Perón, and Stalin often leave the scene only when they die. If the human lifespan lengthens greatly, the dictator in Gabriel García Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, who is "an indefinite age somewhere between 107 and 232 years," may no longer be regarded as a product of magical realism.

Bioengineered nations, top-heavy with the old, will need

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to replenish their labor forces. Here immigration is the economist's traditional solution. In abstract terms, the idea of importing young workers from poor regions of the world seems like a win-win solution: the young get jobs, the old get cheap service. In practice, though, host nations have found that the foreigners in their midst are stubbornly ... foreign. European nations are wondering whether they really should have let in so many Muslims. In the United States, traditionally hospitable to migrants, bilingual education is under attack and the southern border is increasingly locked down. Japan, preoccupied by *Nihonjinron* (theories of "Japaneseness"), has always viewed immigrants with suspicion if not hostility. Facing potential demographic calamity, the Japanese government has spent millions trying to develop a novel substitute for immigrants: robots smart and deft enough to take care of the aged.

According to Ronald Lee, the Berkeley demographer, rises in life expectancy have in the past stimulated economic growth. Because they arose mainly from reductions in infant and child mortality, these rises produced more healthy young workers, which in turn led to more-productive societies. Believing they would live a long time, those young workers saved more for retirement than their forebears, increasing society's stock of capital—another engine of growth. But these positive effects are offset when increases in longevity come from old people's neglecting to die. Older workers are usually less productive than younger ones, earning less and consuming more. Worse, the soaring expenses of entitlement programs for the old are likely, Lee believes, "to squeeze out government expenditures on the next generation," such as education and childhood public-health programs. "I think there's evidence that something like this is already happening among the industrial countries," he says. The combination will force a slowdown in economic growth: the economic pie won't grow as fast. But there's a bright side, at least potentially. If the fall in birth rates is sufficiently vertiginous, the number of people sharing that relatively smaller pie may shrink fast enough to let everyone have a bigger piece. One effect of the longevity-induced "birth dearth" that Wattenburg fears, in other words, may be higher per capita incomes.

For the past thirty years the United States has financed its budget deficits by persuading foreigners to buy U.S. Treasury bonds. In the nature of things, most of these foreigners have lived in other wealthy nations, especially Japan and China. Unfortunately for the United States, those other countries are marching toward longevity crises of their own. They, too, will have fewer young, productive workers. They, too, will be paying for longevity treatments for the old. They, too, will be facing a grinding economic slowdown. For all these reasons they may be less willing to finance our government. If so, Uncle Sam will have to raise interest rates to attract investors, which will further depress growth—a vicious circle.

Longevity-induced slowdowns could make young nations more attractive as investment targets, especially for the cash-strapped pension-and-insurance plans in aging countries. The youthful and ambitious may well follow the money to where the action is. If Mexicans and Guatemalans have fewer rich old people blocking their paths, the river of migration may begin to flow in the other direction. In a reverse brain drain, the Chinese coast guard might discover half-starved American postgraduates stuffed into the holds of smugglers' ships. Highways out of Tijuana or Nogales might bear road signs telling drivers to watch out for *norteamericano* families running across the blacktop, the children's Hello Kitty backpacks silhouetted against a yellow warning background.

Given that today nobody knows precisely how to engineer major increases in the human lifespan, contemplating these issues may seem premature. Yet so many scientists believe that some of the new research will pay off, and that lifespans will stretch like taffy, that it would be shortsighted not to consider the consequences. And the potential changes are so enormous and hard to grasp that they can't be understood and planned for at the last minute. "By definition," says Aubrey de Grey, the Cambridge geneticist, "you live with longevity for a very long time."

BAT

I remember the Sierra pond
where at evening bats went dipping,
pilgrims with sharp chins dipping
to holy water, preying
on mosquitoes as if praying.
I watched them, envying their purpose,
wanting at twenty some purpose.
Snap the hatchling as it rises,
skim the darkness as it rises.
I wanted that perfected arc,
hunting life along an arc,
both creature and creator.

What is it now about the creature
appearing at a sudden angle,
wavering through dusk, angel
of hunger at the night's rim,
like a card flicked at a hat brim?
Now I read it like an icon
blinking on a screen and con
something there that's meaningful,
a little void that's never full.

—MARK JARMAN

Mark Jarman teaches at Vanderbilt University. His latest collection is To the Green Man.

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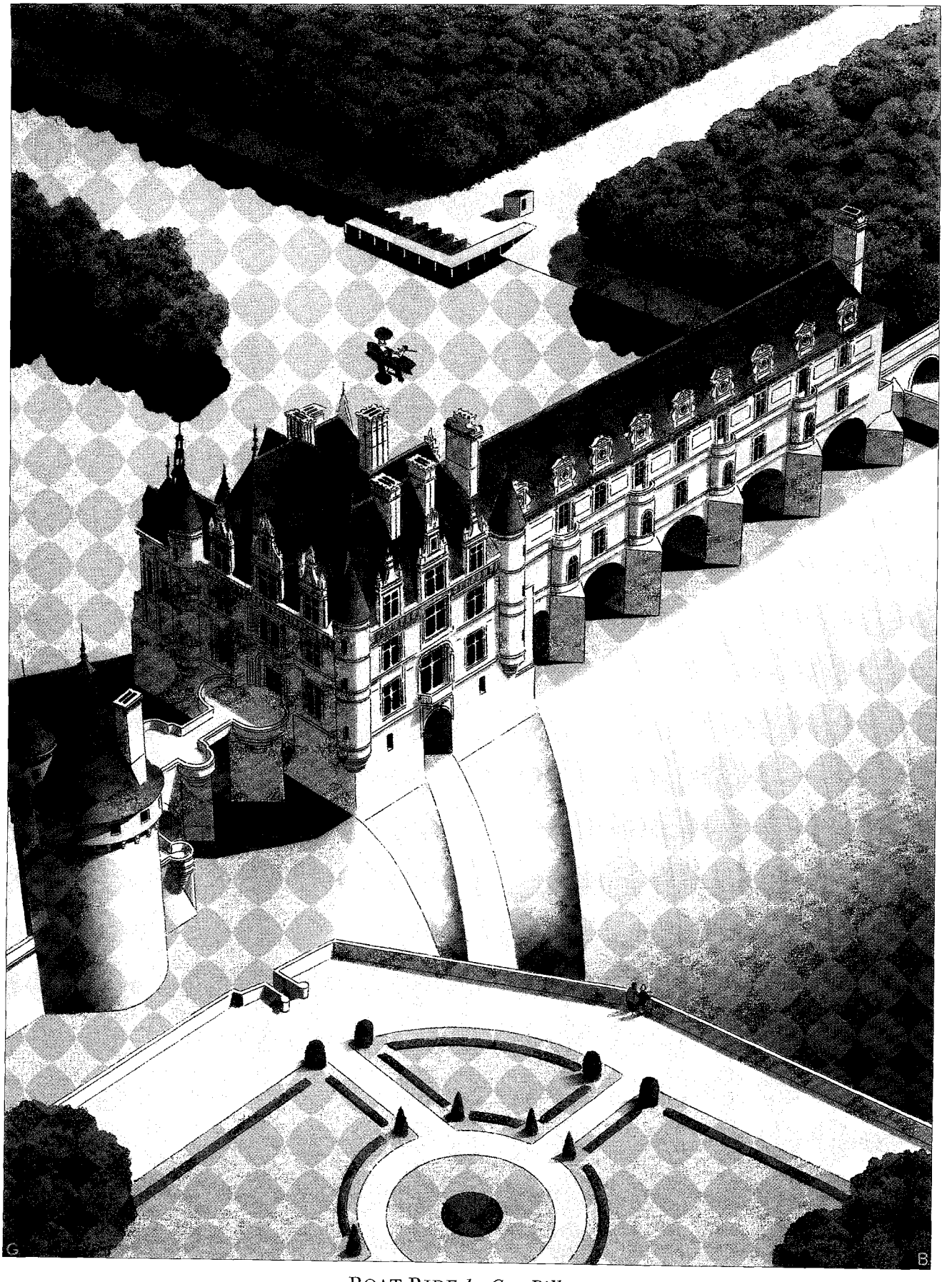

BOAT RIDE *by Guy Billout*

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HOTEL BAGHDAD

Fear and lodging in Iraq

BY WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

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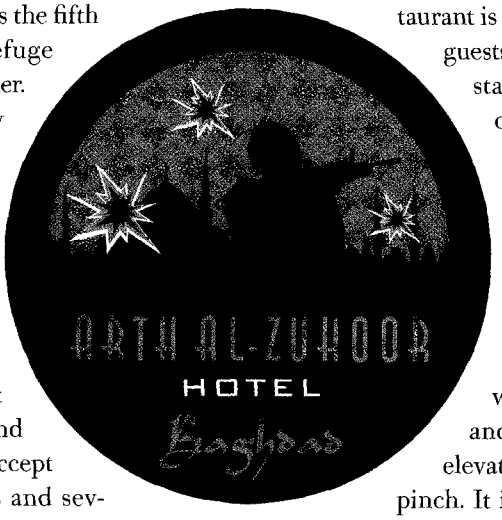
My current home in Baghdad is the fifth in a year, and a fragile refuge from kidnappings and murder. It is a small hotel, and one of the few establishments in town still willing to accept the risk of sheltering Westerners. It has twenty-five suites and six single rooms on six floors, and stands two blocks off a ruined boulevard, on a street that is partially blocked by concrete blast walls. The blast walls form an imperfect compound that contains my hotel and another, larger one also willing to accept foreigners, along with a few houses and several apartment buildings where ordinary Iraqis reside. Though pedestrians walk freely through gates and gaps in the walls, there is only one way in for cars, and it is guarded by men carrying Kalashnikovs, who open trunks and hoods, and use a mirror on a pole to check the undersides for bombs. The guards come under fire from traffic on the boulevard, but this is considered to be minor stuff, which they answer by enthusiastically firing back. I can mention such details without concern for the consequences, because nearly everyone in Baghdad knows about this place already. Mortar rounds fly overhead destined for the fortified Green Zone, about a half mile away across the Tigris River, and several car bombs have exploded nearby (one recently with the force to blow out windows here), but so far no building in the compound has suffered a direct rocket attack. The immunity may be intentional, since the compound serves the insurgency as a useful collection point from which Westerners emerge to brave the streets in their cars; certainly the exits are watched, cars have been followed and chased, and residents have been kidnapped. But the more likely explanation is that richer targets still exist elsewhere in the city, and the insurgents simply haven't gotten around to this one yet.



My hotel has an awning that stretches forward to the street over an unused entrance path bounded by chains as if to control crowds at a gala celebration. The entrance path leads up a few steps to a small glass-fronted restaurant with a locked door. The restaurant is usually empty. In the mornings, a few guests take breakfast there, of instant coffee, stale bread, and imitation honey. Most of the guests are Iraqi men employed by Western companies. They rarely talk. I have been told that this is because they are tense. The hotel's working entrance stands beside the restaurant, and is also glass-fronted. Inside is a miniature lobby, with a high reception desk and a bald clerk who sits low behind it, handing out and retrieving room keys. There is an elevator big enough for three people in a pinch. It is rarely used, because the national power frequently fails, and when it does, the standby generator often won't start. Across from the reception desk is a benchlike sofa against the wall, where sometimes two or three Iraqi men sit smoking silently. I figure they are not quite unemployed, because simply by proximity to Westerners they expose themselves to considerable risk, but I do not know who they are. They are reliably polite. In the cold months they wear leather jackets. At least one provides security, which means that in case of trouble he might fire a pistol or otherwise make noise. Late at night he locks and unlocks the glass front door. If you ask, he will also unlock a little glass case in the lobby, displaying a jumble of tarnished jewelry and other trinkets that no one buys. There is a painting nearby, apparently for sale, of a woman in a red dress lying alluringly on her back, while a white horse hovers strangely in the air above her. It has bothered me vaguely that the horse can fly but does not have wings.

The hotel is called Arth Al-Zuhoor. The name is written in Arabic on a small sign hanging outside, on which it is translated into English as "the Flowers Land," and further defined as a "tourist hotel." The sign is the original. It dates from the hotel's opening, in October of 2001, in the era of Saddam Hussein. Just what kind of tourists the owners had in mind is unclear. The manager then is the manager now. He is a well-fed middle-aged man. His name is Mr. Haider. He has a grand office in the back with an upholstered desk, a television tuned to an Egyptian channel,

William Langewiesche is a national correspondent for The Atlantic.

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and a set of soft creamy sofas and chairs. He is friendly but dignified. He serves Turkish coffee to people who stop by. He once went out of his way to assure me that the Flowers Land is the safest establishment in all of Baghdad. He was talking about the war, not the food. He claimed that the neighborhood is inhabited by peaceful retirees, and that it enjoys the city's best weather, too—warmer in the winter, and a bit cooler for the rest of the year. From this I concluded that he has not given up on the tourist idea. He is pragmatic, however, and has no objection to his current clientele—the occasional mercenary, a few second-string reporters, maybe a French photographer or two, and larger numbers of Iraqi drivers and guards. When they are all added together, the hotel is rarely full. The suites cost about $100 a night. Residents walk in and out carrying weapons, and sit in their rooms discussing the available angles of fire and the usefulness of tossing grenades down the stairwells to slow a determined assault.

Guns are tools that beg to be used. The Flowers Land is a latent battlefield. It is a six-floor, twenty-five-suite, six-single-room arsenal with a dangerous restaurant serving greasy kabobs. Mr. Haider originally wanted to call it Arth Al-Mahabba, or "the Lovely Land," but names in Iraq were regulated by the Baathist regime, and when he went to an agency for a "scientific search," he discovered that this one was not on the approved list. Prudently he decided that Lovely Land was a better name for a garden than a hotel. He had experienced a similar disappointment before. He had wanted to call his daughter Rose, but had been told that he could not. This irritated him for years, because he loved his daughter, and had a special affection for flowers. Indeed, his second choice for naming the hotel was the Gardenia—but after another scientific search this, too, was disallowed. It seemed that gardenias were meant to be flowers only, and not to be confused with any business or building. Mr. Haider swerved adroitly, and came up with the name Qasr Al-Zuhoor, or "the Flowers Palace." This time the denial was tinged with a warning: Flowers Palace was a former name for the grand British-built edifice now called the Republican Palace, where Saddam Hussein held forth. Did Mr. Haider really believe that his hotel merited the comparison? No, emphatically not, and the thought hadn't even crossed his mind. Swerving again, he came upon the idea of the Flowers Land, another name for a garden, obviously, but one that for mysterious reasons sailed through the scientific search and emerged as the name of a hotel. Publicly, Mr. Haider was satisfied. Privately, he held a grudge. He did not exactly wave the Stars and Stripes when the United States invaded, eighteen months after he hung up the sign, but immediately afterward he renamed his daughter Rose.

Those were golden times for people like him. After the first few unsettled weeks the streets were relatively safe, room rates were high, and thousands of foreigners came flocking in, spilling their bundles of cash. Along with all the journalists in town, there were gamblers and schemers of every sort, most of them jockeying for imagined contracts with the American occupation government, many of them living hard. They hired cars, and wandered the country far and wide, and when they returned to Baghdad, they sat around in the hotel bars swapping lies, and in some cases getting extraordinarily drunk. I remember one night in a large hotel across town watching a Russian fall right off his stool. It was late, and I was astonished that he could get so drunk yet stay awake to do it. Mortar rounds were dropping into the neighborhood just then, some close enough to send shock waves through our chests. The Russian's companion, dispassionately observing his friend on the floor, assured me that the idiot knew damned well there was no need yet to take cover. Those people were brave, I guess. They were certainly enterprising. But over the months that followed, as the war intensified, it gradually became clear that the deals were being made in Washington and not here, and one by one the business people disappeared. Other foreigners departed too, out of frustration or fear. Some managed to burrow into the Green Zone, where they continue to hustle for scraps among the American officials in that world of near total isolation. But enduring the culture of the Green Zone is a high price to pay for professional success, and most foreigners opted to go home instead. Their exodus has left the hotels almost exclusively to the press. Though the ranks have thinned, the number of reporters who remain is sufficient to allow for the survival of the few places defensible enough to let them in. Location is everything in Baghdad hotels. That is the real reason for Mr. Haider's continuing success. Of course he is enterprising and brave. But he is also simply lucky. When he promotes the Flowers Land for its tourist appeal, it is inconceivable that anyone is fooled. The Flowers Land endures because it is safely withdrawn from the boulevards, and happens to stand directly across the street from an establishment that for similar reasons has become the most popular in town—a hotel called the Hamra.

The Hamra was named after the family that owns it, without any need, therefore, for a scientific search. It is twice as large as the Flowers Land. It is vulnerable to rocket attack, but difficult to bomb with a car. Its entrance door remains locked at all times. The door is protected by a steel grille, and is assiduously guarded by men armed with Kalashnikovs. People entering are sometimes searched. They are expected to leave their weapons at a desk, and some do. This makes for an artificially civilized atmosphere inside. There are two buildings, each of which has a small reception desk. They are known as Buildings One and Two. They contain suites, all with stoves and sinks, some with one bedroom, some with two. Building One has a coffee shop, with a long menu of Iraqi and Chinese food. Building Two has a bakery. In between them, and protected by high concrete walls, is a split-level deck containing a swimming pool. The pool is the cleanest in Baghdad, and has much to do with the Hamra's fame. Back in the golden times,

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especially during the first summer and fall following the invasion, it was the center of an evening social scene that had all the makings of a beach party. Think barbecues, bikinis, and beer. This was a war in which a large number of women were involved, both as correspondents and as aid workers. The men and women tended to be unattached, unafraid, and young. As a result, at the Hamra there was a lot of shacking-up going on. There was a lot of casual sex. This is no longer so true. The casual types have gone away, leaving reduced crews of serious and hard-pressed people behind. More important, as the value of the entire adventure has come increasingly into question, the romance of being in Baghdad has simply worn thin. At the Hamra the swimming pool is now left largely alone, and the other public spaces seem strangely empty; the residents have withdrawn to work in their rooms, and one would hardly suspect that most of the time both buildings are full.

The hotel has inner defenses that cannot safely be described. Suffice it to say that the Hamra would be hard to take even for a large group of *mujahideen* with suicidal intent. Some of the most visible guests are those who would make it so: they are the Western security men—British, American, typically tattooed, muscular, and short-haired—who at exorbitant cost have been hired by the big news organizations to protect their staffs. They sit around in the coffee shop drinking tea and chuckling over the antics of the reporters. As is well known, a few of those reporters spend their entire tours inside. This is not necessarily their fault: some of those who work for the large television networks, for instance, live under a house arrest so strict that they would violate it at the cost of their jobs. "Live from Baghdad" for them means live from the roof.

Guns are tools that beg to be used. The Flowers Land hotel is a latent battlefield. It is a six-floor, twenty-five-suite, six-single-room arsenal with a dangerous restaurant serving greasy kabobs.

At the other extreme are the handful of freelancers still in town. They are photographers and writers, looking to break through to steadier jobs, and compelled to take risks that others do not—seeking out the insurgents, for instance, or getting themselves caught on the receiving end of American fire. They may be smart or not. They appear in the coffee shop, nod to their friends, and perhaps down a beer before disappearing to their rooms to shower and sleep. They are young. I know one who until coming to Baghdad had never been abroad. He told me that he had to struggle now against imagining that the entire world is like this. He had stopped by Europe recently, and had been struck by its similarity to the United States.

But the core reporters are different again. They work for newspapers and weekly magazines, pounding away on laptop computers against deadlines set by North American clocks, and trying to accommodate the requests of distant editors who have little sense of the realities here. The old hands among them got their starts in the Balkan wars a decade ago, but most of these people owe their careers to the attacks of September 11, 2001. They were city-desk reporters or the like, some quite junior, but they seized this opportunity to head to Afghanistan and the Middle East, and they became experienced fast. Some positioned themselves in Iraq before the war, and in at least one case suffered the consequences: a charming and quick-witted reporter for *Newsday* named Matthew McAllester, who remains in Baghdad today, was arrested for being a spy, and thrown into the Abu Ghraib prison; he was released just prior to the city's fall. Others came in with the American troops, bearing witness to the soldiers' success, however superficial they suspected it to be. Still others arrived later, and found themselves even more deeply at war. All of them have struggled ever since, within the confines of journalistic convention, at balancing official assertions of progress against the reality so obvious here: the systematic failure of America's policy in Iraq. They are at once earnest and cynical about their role. If they do not give weight to official interpretations of the news, or if they appear too bluntly to contradict them, they are quickly accused of bias—an assertion that from a distance people find all too easy to believe. Could things really be so bad in Iraq? The reporters are left with little choice but to scatter their observations and bury the counterpoints deep within their columns, trusting readers to move beyond the headlines and pick up the hints. The collective mood as a result has shifted from enthusiasm for the subject to quiet frustration and fatigue. Every reporter I know seems to have grown ambivalent about staying on in Iraq. Related to this are the practical limitations, which compared with those of any other assignment in memory have become severe: given the insecurity of the roads, the reporters can hardly leave the city unless they "embed" themselves within the military (and write the corresponding stories), and even in Baghdad they can move only at great risk, and almost never on foot. This leads to another accusation—that they are engaged in "hotel journalism," and might as well be writing from the comforts of the Four Seasons in Amman. They themselves agonize over the restraints they face. But the truth is that they are by no means prisoners of this place, and they rarely stay inside the Hamra for even one full day; despite the risks, most of them continue to explore and to learn, to cultivate good sources, and to maintain a close view of Iraq. If one can generalize about such a disparate group, they are ethical, energetic, and extraordinarily brave. Some are cultivated and obviously quite brilliant as well. Their readers are spoiled. The Hamra houses an impressive crowd.

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The suites aren't bad either. They are furnished brightly in a spare urban style reminiscent of that promoted by Ikea—a welcome relief from the heavy Arab furnishings and decorations of other establishments. The large news organizations occupy sets of suites, or entire floors, and their rotating crews tend to run roughshod over the interiors, strewing their computers and flak vests about, and not so much residing in their rooms as camping out. Individual reporters, however, have established real homes, complete with iPod stereos, small libraries, and well-supplied kitchens. Groups of reporters sometimes gather in these places for small dinner parties over mediocre wine but otherwise exquisite meals. They leave their cell phones on, and come and go as required by work, but during the lulls outside, when there is no noise of helicopters or fighting to be heard, they might almost be sitting in New York's Upper West Side. Their conversations range wide, but return predictably to the subject of Iraq. It is here that one can see the depth of their expertise and get a sense of the frustration they feel that so little of what they know finally emerges in print. Though they are friends, and some are lovers, they do not talk much in these groups about their personal lives. They do talk about security, hashing over the ever changing threats in specific detail, and discussing shifts in their tactics of self-defense. Some admit to being superstitious—to carrying lucky stones in their pockets, or refusing ever to light their cigarettes from candles. But the emotion they express is concern rather than fear. Only once have I seen the conversation falter—over a certain on-camera decapitation. The sound of explosions and firefights, on the other hand, scarcely merits their attention; recently at a dinner when a series of mortar rounds fell nearby, the conversation, which happened to be about coverage by *The New York Times*, did not miss a beat. Matthew McAllester may have noticed that I was amused. He smiled and said, "Quite a jaded bunch." With irony and not the slightest trace of bluster, he admitted to his own disappointment with explosions less resonant than those of the biggest car bombs. This is the sort of statement that the superstitious should not make. But after a year of visits to Iraq, I knew what he meant. If you're going to do it, at least do it right.

Groups of reporters sometimes gather at the Hamra hotel for small dinner parties. Here one can get a sense of the frustration they feel that so little of what they know finally emerges in print.

Over at the Flowers Land the war feels closer to home, and even the small explosions may merit comment. My suite is on the second floor, on the back side of the building, which is poorly protected. The sitting room is narrow. It is overfurnished with two threadbare easy chairs, a matching threadbare sofa, and a coffee table that seems to have been dragged in from the streets. It has a small desk with a chair. It has a TV. I sit here among Iraqi friends, with weapons scattered about. At the far end of the room is a sliding glass door, taped with an X to mitigate shattering. The framing is flimsy, and rattles from mortar rounds even a half mile away. For larger explosions we go outside to check for smoke, and to watch the helicopters swarming around. The door gives onto a small balcony overlooking a large dirt lot heavily strewn with garbage. A pack of feral dogs lives below the balcony, among the weeds. They are large and yellow, and include a litter of yelping puppies who play and tumble around. When people approach, the adult dogs raise their hackles and snarl threateningly. They retreat when rocks are thrown, but their presence comforts me anyway, because of the chance they might alert us to intruders. Beyond the lot and to one side stands a windowless bunker said to have been built by the French to withstand a nuclear attack. The bunker has a concrete mushroom top, and extends several levels below ground. Currently it houses the minister of the interior, whose family is believed to be safely abroad. It is protected by machine gunners in booths attached high on walls, and by loose groups of ill-disciplined Iraqi police, who mill around on the dirt out beyond the dogs. Their presence does not reassure me, because they are as likely as not to fire on us if we ever have to jump from the balcony, and they get especially edgy once the sun goes down. Recently after curfew they opened fire furiously at something real or imagined across the lot—I never found out what. This was the second time in three nights, and they did not let up. We extinguished our lights and hit the floor. An Iraqi friend went squirming out onto the balcony with his Kalashnikov, though no rounds were coming through the glass, and it seemed obvious that we ourselves were not (yet) under attack. I pulled on his ankle, and got him to come back inside. It was a diverting few minutes. But the nights at the Flowers Land are usually slow. We keep the curtains drawn, and eat takeout chicken, hummus, and flatbread. Sometimes we watch movies on TV. My friend calls himself Van Damme, after the action hero. He wears wraparound sunglasses. He is good with a gun. He performs a pistol trick, cycling the fifteen rounds through the chamber of a Beretta and catching each ejected bullet in midair. He times himself and tries to beat his record. When he tires of that, he plays a shooting game on his cell phone. I work on notes and read. Sometimes we watch Lebanese music videos to see the women dance. On the wall above my desk hangs a painting of a reclining maiden gazing into a hand mirror that she holds overhead. I gaze at her too, but do not find her as attractive as she seems to find herself. This may change. The hotels of Baghdad are not prisons, but they do provide time to ponder such things.

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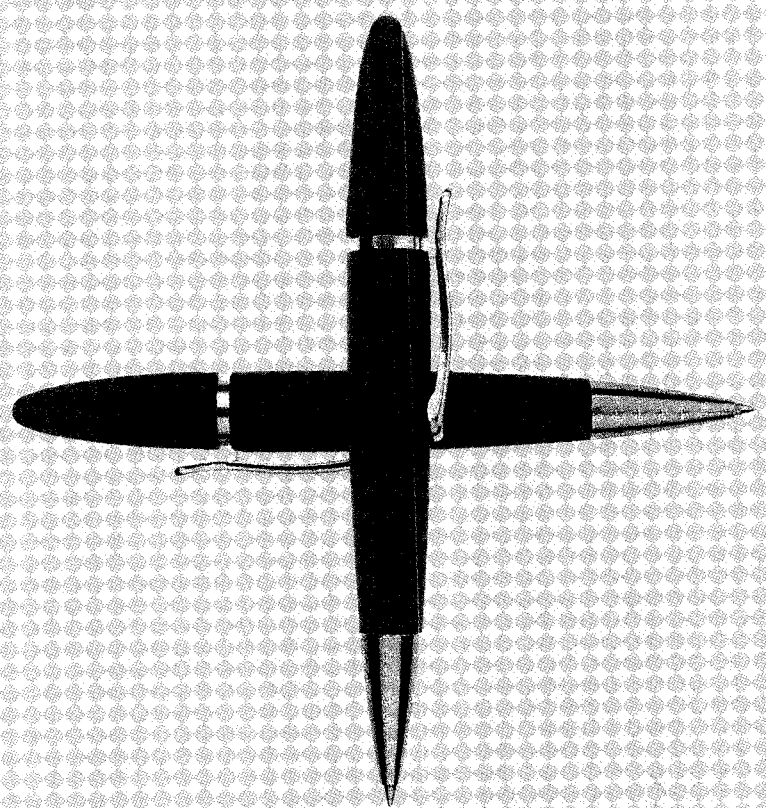

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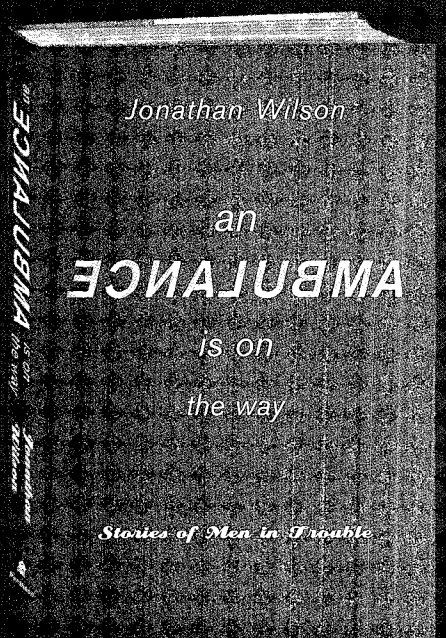
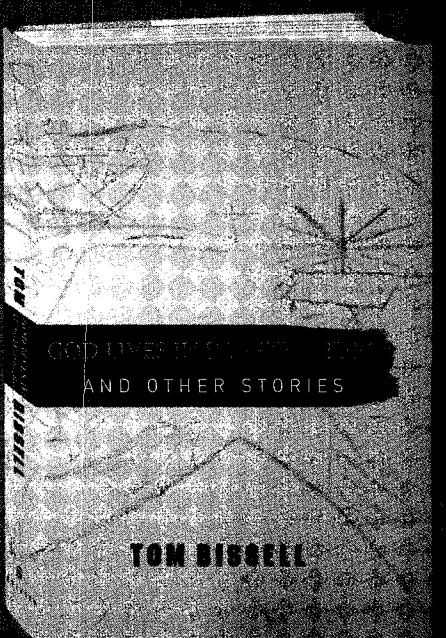
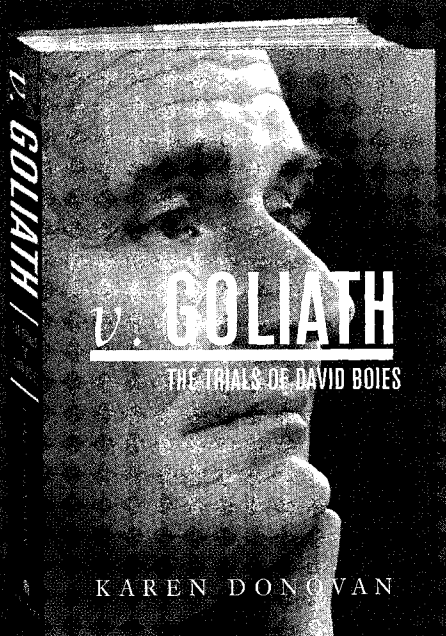


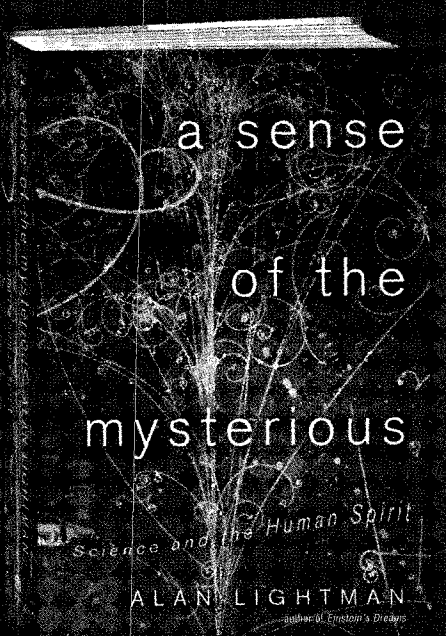
In **AN AMBULANCE IS ON THE WAY**, Jonathan Wilson's "tantalizing stories...explore with humor and pathos the wayward habits of the male heart...with disarming intelligence and imagination." *–Elle*



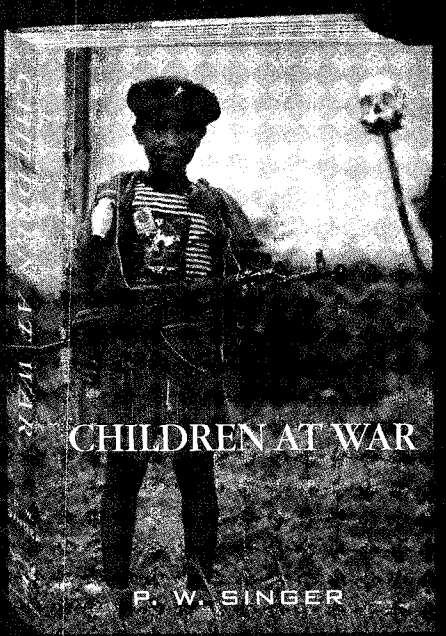
Tom Bissell's **GOD LIVES IN ST. PETERSBURG** is a collection of "six razor-sharp, black-comic stories.... Fiction full of friction.... It's a thrill to watch the sparks fly." *–Newsweek*



In Karen Donovan's **V. GOLIATH**, "all of the things that have made David Boies America's most successful and intriguing lawyer... are neatly illuminated...canny and entertaining." –David Margolick, Contributing Editor, *Vanity Fair*



In **A SENSE OF THE MYSTERIOUS**, Alan Lightman "communicates the beauty, mystery, elegance, danger, fulfillment, frustration, irony, and potential of science." *–Chicago Tribune*



P.W. Singer's **CHILDREN AT WAR** is "a compelling portrait of this devastating problem." *–Christian Science Monitor*

"It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars for them." –Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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REVIEWED THIS MONTH:

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by Steven Gaines
London 1945
by Maureen Waller
The Command of the Ocean
by N.A.M. Rodger
reviewed by Benjamin Schwarz
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Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close
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John Brown, Abolitionist
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Never Let Me Go
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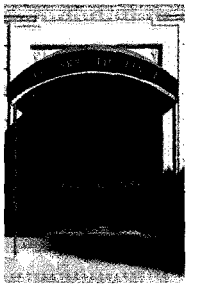
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Eminent Domains

What to read this month

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

If, as Gaines asserts, "real estate has become a voyeuristic preoccupation in America," then this is one smutty book. It probes the world of Manhattan's most exclusive apartment houses—both the so-called Good Buildings on Fifth and Park Avenues and the now glam towers on Central Park West—and dishes plenty of tittle-tattle about such matters as the rigors of Tommy Hilfiger's shockingly successful interview with the co-op board of 820 Fifth Avenue (no endeavor on earth is more arduous than getting into one of these buildings), the details of Donna Karan's deal for her digs at 55 Central Park West, and celebrity renovations at the San Remo. The gossip is pretty tired or predictable for devoted readers of the aggressively jaded *New York Observer*, and the potted histories (of the development of apartments in New York, of the Ansonia Hotel, of Sutton Place) read like digests of, for example, Elizabeth Hawes's *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City*. But Gaines's profiles of his guides—some of the fanciest real-estate brokers in the city—are charming. For the most part these people come off as ironic, skeptical, and very smart—and a lot more interesting, sensible, and humane than their clients. But what makes this book really fascinating is what makes such dated books as Cleveland Amory's and Stephen Birmingham's portraits of the rich and well-born, and John O'Hara's novels, still arresting: the analysis of minute social gradations within the privileged classes. As Gaines nicely puts it, "The location of an apartment half a block in either direction, the age or construction of a particular building ... can peg your social or financial status, your religious or ethnic background, or your sexual preference." For instance, even now that Fifth Avenue has nearly completed its evolution (or, some would say, decline) into its current tinselly condition (read "the home of more and more celebrities," but really read "the home of more and more Jews"), Central Park still represents an enormous social chasm, between the East Side (read "fewer Jews") and the West Side ("more Jews"). On this very small island the differences between exclusive enclaves are at once subtle and vast; and no doubt Mariah



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT
by Steven Gaines
Little, Brown

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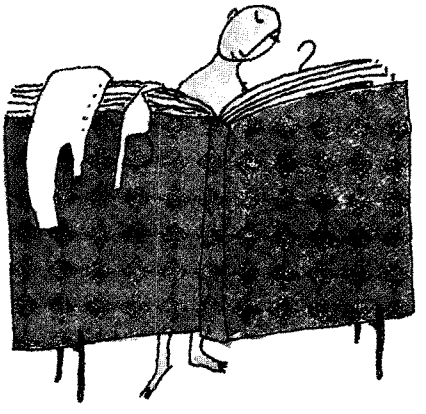
Carey really did feel "banished," as Gaines recounts, when the co-op board of the Upper West Side's Ardsley rejected her and she beat a retreat to "the multimillion dollar confines of the lofts of TriBeCa"—where she consoled herself by hiring "the uptown 'Prince of Chintz,' Mario Buatta" to decorate her penthouse triplex. Gaines precisely dissects the distinctions between, say, the milieus of the Upper East Side's chilly and remote (in more ways than one) Sutton Place and its lovely haute bourgeois Carnegie Hill, and between Chelsea and the West Village, but surprisingly he fails to explicate those between the apartment houses on Park Avenue and the ones on Fifth (again, read "fewer Jews, more Jews")—distinctions that Tom Wolfe has keenly gauged. Indeed, some Good Buildings are better than others, and no two are good in the same way. With such formidable and intrusive vetting procedures, these edifices can't help having marked personalities; in fact, they're "vertical *neighborhoods*," explains the most socially exclusive of Gaines's brokers. Gaines, who wrote the similar *Philistines at the Hedgerow*, a chronicle of mansions and millionaires in the Hamptons, has the formula of gossipy sociology down pat; but anyone who describes the Upper West Side's Columbus Avenue—a boulevard that epitomizes urban gentrification, meaning it's lined with the favorite chain stores of the upper middle class and with far too many restaurants that serve brunch—as "a seething multicultural and honky-tonk world" with a "Tenderloin feel" has too thoroughly absorbed the peculiar viewpoint of his subjects.

London 1945, *by Maureen Waller* (St. Martin's). Wartime London is a great literary subject. The ravages were so terrible (pieces of children littered the bomb sites), so poignant (treasures such as the Guards' Chapel and the Great Synagogue lost, five million books destroyed in a single night in a bombing raid), and so surreal (walking back from lunch at Simpson's, an editor of the *Evening Standard* noticed that the blast from a V-1 flying bomb had stripped the leaves from the trees and replaced them with human flesh). Also, the sustained attack over five years on a great and civilized city provided ample scope for the usual mixture of cowardice and heroism, selfishness and altruism, fecklessness and pluck. And finally, so many sensitive and articulate people recorded and distilled their experiences there. Of course these include George Orwell ("The Lion and the Unicorn"), Anthony Powell (*The Valley of Bones, The Soldier's Art, The Military Philosophers*), Evelyn Waugh (*Sword of Honour*), Mollie Panter-Downes (*London War Notes*), Henry Green (*Caught*), Elizabeth Bowen (*The Heat of the Day*), Harold Nicolson (*Diaries and Letters: The War Years*), and Graham Greene



(*The End of the Affair*). But hundreds of literate and well-spoken ordinary men and women—clerks, housewives, doctors, social workers—also wrote vivid, funny, moving, and stylish diaries and letters, or were interviewed during the war (in its efforts to keep citizens productive and healthy, officialdom collected information of unprecedented depth and range about their everyday lives). Although Waller isn't the first to exploit these sources specifically or this rich subject generally (*London 1945* joins the ranks of such works as Philip Zeigler's *London at War* and Robert Hewison's *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939–1945*), her 528-page book is at once abundantly and discerningly detailed (she aptly quotes a Walthamstow woman's description of the silent V-2s, successors of the droning V-1s, as "bombs with slippers on"), and her depiction of the daily fabric of wartime life in the capital is unrivaled. Moreover, Waller has used the last year of the war as her cynosure, an illuminating approach that allows her to show how the previous five years ruptured all of London life, from the cityscape to family relations to fashion. More important, it reveals not the familiar story of indomitable Londoners facing the Blitz but, rather, how the fervor of "their finest hour" modulated into a squalid and dispiriting routine, how defiance lapsed into snappishness, and how resilience gave way to exhaustion, cynicism, and not infrequently despair (one Croyden woman who gassed herself wrote in her suicide note simply: "The war lasted too long for me. I can't go on"). This is a sad book about a city staggering to victory.

The Command of the Ocean, *by N.A.M. Rodger* (Norton). The second installment of Rodger's projected three-part naval history of Britain is one of very few books that actually warrant the adjective "magisterial." In this 900-plus-page volume, which concentrates on the period of the so-called Second Hundred Years' War against the French (1689–1815), Rodger elucidates the Royal Navy's rise to global preponderance and its consolidation as the single most influential institution in the nation's life. "Naval dominance of European waters," he asserts, "was the largest, longest, most complex and expensive project ever undertaken by the British state and society," and this sprawling and intricate story perforce embraces diplomacy, religion, and politics; economic, technological, and social trends; and developments in medicine and agriculture. Nothing, from the sociology of the dockyards to the evolution of gunnery tactics, escapes Rodger's acute analysis. Rodger made his reputation with the seminal work *The Wooden World*, in which he dissected the elaborately organized and highly cooperative life on board the ships of the eighteenth-century navy (and in the process completely overturned the notion that "rum, sodomy, and the lash" were its defining traditions), so

THE ATLANTIC SELECTION

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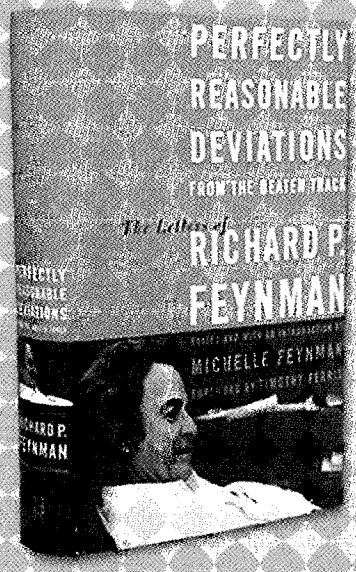
MAVERICK PHYSICIST
Nobel Laureate
A LIFE IN LETTERS



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it's no surprise that his evocation of that life here is lavish and fascinating. Women and children, he reveals, were common aboard ship (evidence suggests that one warship carried as many as a hundred wives), and were not infrequently killed in action (when one seaman and his wife died in combat, the wardroom goat suckled their three-week-old orphan). The vast number of people and wide variety of skills that war at sea demanded made the navy an astonishingly open institution: a senior petty officer during the Napoleonic Wars, for instance, was both black and a woman (though the latter fact was discovered only after she'd already served eleven years). Although Rodger is discerning in his assessment of every social level of the wooden world, he's especially perceptive in analyzing the recruitment, training, and culture of the officer corps; the navy, which required that its officers begin their careers by carrying out the duties of common seamen and mastering the skills of those they would command, "identified and promoted good men very fast," making it undoubtedly the most meritocratic institution in a society defined by archaic privilege. But as colorful as is this book's account of life and combat at sea, Rodger focuses on the developments on land that gave Britain command of the ocean. The most crucial advances in his story aren't naval or even technological but, rather, financial and administrative. The full capabilities of sea power could be realized only "when ships could be kept at sea with healthy crews for long periods." This seemingly obvious requirement demanded a national endeavor of unprecedented complexity and scope. In this period the British state, thanks to a greatly increased tax base and a wonderfully efficient collection system, had access to a greater portion of national income than did its rivals, and a huge amount of that wealth went to the state's highest-spending and most technologically sophisticated enterprise: its navy, which was by far Britain's largest contractor and employer, as well as the largest buyer of foodstuffs in the London markets. Facing problems of management on a scale "as yet unknown to private business," the navy built administrative systems of enormous competence, run by a cadre of officials of rare probity and ability (of whom Samuel Pepys was the most celebrated). This bureaucracy nurtured advances in technology high and low, managed contractors and adjusted markets with finesse, oversaw developments in medicine and hygiene (the navy—whose officers were fanatical about the cleanliness of their ships—enlisted some of Britain's most distinguished physicians to improve shipboard sanitation and diet, and its Sick and Hurt Board laid the foundations for the public-health movement and for the science of epidemiology), and, most important, revolutionized the feeding of men. Rodger makes clear that the single indispensable ingredient of the navy's success was its Victualling Board, which in its time must have been the world's best-organized government administration. Thanks to its efforts, thousands of men could be pent up in ships on the open seas for half a year yet be, as Rodger shows, "the healthiest body of British subjects in the world."

Rodger's appraisal of logistics and bureaucracy is the most penetrating and skillful I've encountered. Only a writer of verve could make these potentially deadening subjects compelling. It must have been tempting for Rodger to rely solely on his staggering erudition (he cites sources written in a dozen languages) and the sure knowledge that regardless of its literary qualities, his book will be the definitive treatment of its subject for at least a century (Paul Kennedy has justifiably said that Rodger's series will be "one of the great works of historical scholarship of our age"). But there's not a lazy sentence here, and a keen intelligence propels every paragraph. Sadly, though, with only a couple of exceptions, Rodger confines his acerbic wit to his eighty-six-page (!) annotated bibliography, which is full of waspish asides, including this one, directed at *The Admiralty*, by one N.A.M. Rodger: "Sketchy and unreliable."

Benjamin Schwarz is the literary editor and the national editor of The Atlantic.

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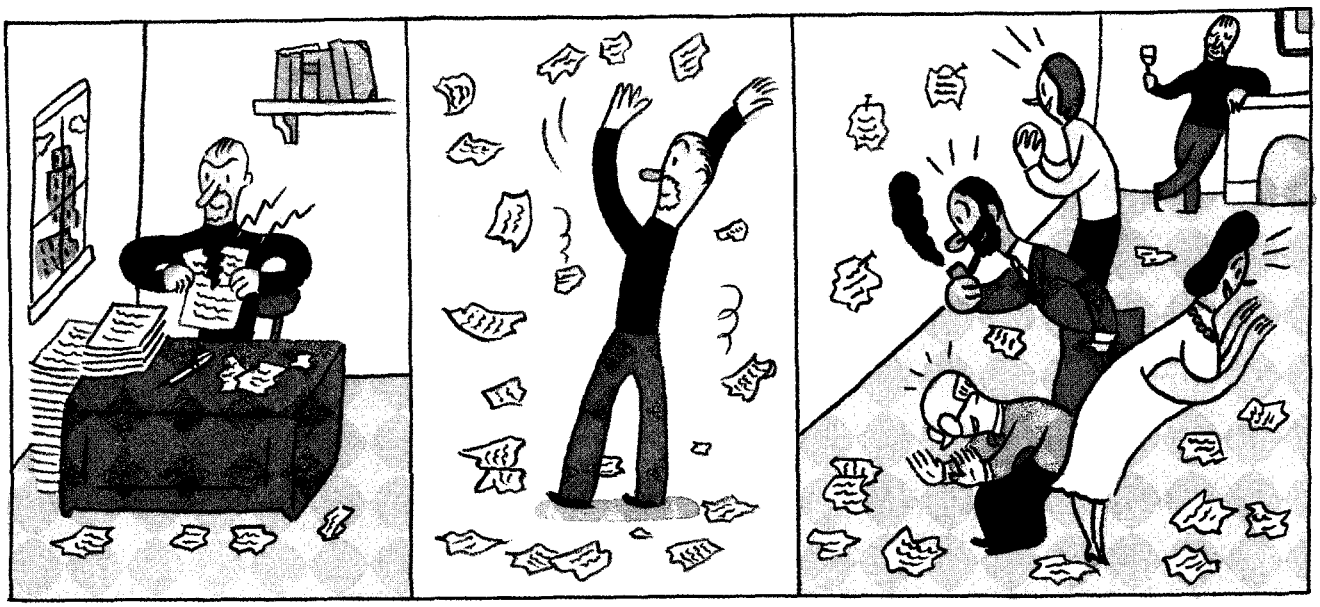


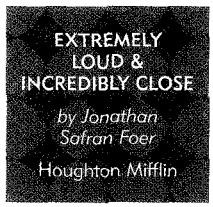
BOOKS

A Bag of Tired Tricks

Blank pages? Photos of mating tortoises? The death throes of the postmodern novel

BY B. R. MYERS

In 1967 *The Atlantic Monthly* published John Barth's essay "The Literature of Exhaustion," a manifesto of postmodernism in which Barth argued that the possibilities of conventional storytelling had been "used up." It was time to start thwarting the public's expectations of what a novel should be—such as the silly notion that a story should be told in chronological order instead of, say, in jumbled fragments, with cheeky reminders that none of the events therein ever took place. Oh, the fun writers and readers would have together, now that the old rules no longer needed to apply! Sadly, though, most people took one look at this new style of writing and decided that conventional storytelling could stand a good deal more using up after all. Some readers were hugely impressed, but even they often had a hard time figuring out whether a given "experimental" novel grated against their sensibility because they weren't intellectually worthy of it or because it was just plain bad. Demand for expert opinion grew, and university classes, prizes, and dust-jacket blurbs proliferated to meet it.



But by the end of the 1970s postmodernism had degenerated from a startling assault on traditional narrative into a style as predictable as any other; there are, it seems, only so many ways to avoid telling a straightforward story. Since then those with a vested interest in the movement have employed various little tricks, if not always consciously, to sustain its primacy in American literature.

In the 1980s, for example, any involving story written in an unobtrusive, un-writerly, and thus un-postmodern style began to be classified as "genre" fiction. A subtler ruse followed a decade later, when we were told that postmodernism had been superseded by something called post-postmodernism, which was itself fast being superseded by—but I forget exactly. The upshot was that while the Next Big Things might look a lot like the Last Big Things, the requisite "study" would show them to be completely different. It all sounded very exciting, but when meandering, footnote-laden novels like David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) sprawled out on the display tables, it became obvious that nothing had changed. Literary critics now acknowledge that postmodernism never went away, but to distract us from its advanced age they cry up a new "pomo" wunderkind every year or two.

In 2002 it was Jonathan Safran Foer. While still a creative-writing student, he had traveled to Ukraine to investigate his ethnic roots but found "nothing to see"—not even, it seems, the museum near the site of his grandfather's shtetl. Upon returning home he decided to create the region's color and history from his imagination. Such an approach can yield fascinating results, as anyone who has read Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) will attest. Unfortunately, the Eastern Europe presented in Foer's first novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, turned out to be, with its zany curses and America-mad youth, more than familiar enough to obviate the author's later admission that he had watched a lot of TV growing up. There were even fewer surprises in the novel's format. The disjointed story narrated in different "voices," the author turning up under his own name as a character writing a novel, the final chapter ending in mid-sentence, idiosyncratic punctuation and eye-catching TYPOGRAPHY—need I go on? It must be admitted that Foer at times seemed too talented for the traditions he had chosen to work in. The line "May his name be lost between

MARC ROSENTHAL

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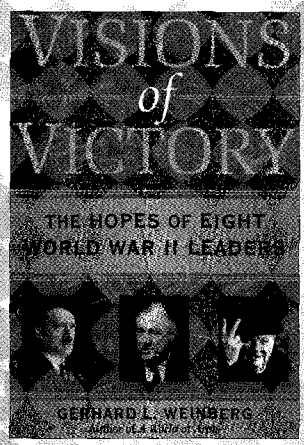

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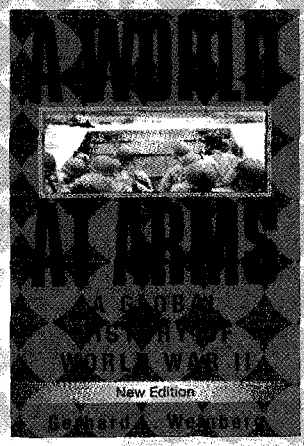

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cushions," for instance, is funny enough to make one overlook the staleness of the comic device involved.

On the whole, however, the reaction to the book was more interesting than the book itself. Marie Arana, of *The Washington Post*, promised that *Everything Is Illuminated* would make readers feel "altered, chastened—seared in the fire of something new," while *The Times* of London said, "It's a new kind of novel [and] after it things will never be the same." A reviewer in *The Vancouver Sun* let it be known, presumably by jiggling his eyeballs at an intern, that he was "frozen by excitement" and "dumbstruck with amazement and joy." Joyce Carol Oates and Jeffrey Eugenides loved the novel, as did *The New York Times*, which gave it two rave reviews. The novelist and critic Dale Peck said admiring things too, thus making one wonder if his attack on Rick Moody's similar style in 2002 hadn't been actuated by personal animus after all. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Time*, *The New York Observer*—the unanimity of the praise was as extraordinary as its almost giddy tone.

Postmodern readers "work" with their writers only in the sense that volunteers from an audience work with the stage hypnotist: emptying their minds and smiling through one humiliation after another.

But these days a novel can be called a masterpiece without even being regarded as consistently good, and most of Foer's reviewers conceded—albeit with the air of someone noting an erratum in the table of contents—that one of the book's two narrators had done little more than make them yearn for the other. There was also a consensus that the last few dozen pages were unfortunate. Not since Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) had critical acclaim concentrated so heavily on one part of a novel. Which part? This is Francine Prose, writing in *The New York Times*:

> It's hard to get through the first chapters of *Everything Is Illuminated*. The problem is, you keep laughing out loud, losing your place, starting again, then stopping because you're tempted to call your friends and read them long sections of Jonathan Safran Foer's assured, hilarious prose.

Before anyone accuses me of seeking out the least hilarious example of this writing, here is the opening passage, which was quoted by Prose and many others:

> My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name. Mother dubs me Alexi-stop-spleening-me!, because I am always spleening her. If you want to know why I am always spleening her, it is because I am always elsewhere with friends, and disseminating so much currency ... I have a miniature brother who dubs me Alli ... Father dubs him Clumsy One, because he is always promenading into things. It was only four days previous that he made his eye blue from a mismanagement with a brick wall.

Well, it would never do if we all laughed at the same things. But allow me to state the obvious: this is to verbal comedy what cream pies are to the visual kind. If Charles Dickens and countless others have restricted their own Alexes to minor roles, it is because all forms of malapropism are in effect—as dawns on even the sitcom viewer after a minute or two—no more than variations on a single joke. The question, then, is how so many could have found this mangled-language shtick both screamingly funny and searingly *new*. It isn't as if Foer handles it particularly well. Alex imparts no sense of a Slavic speaker learning English (the syntax of that last sentence would put the average American college freshman to shame), and his errors are distractingly contrived. "Flaccid" is here not the wrong synonym for "easy" but the wrong antonym for "hard," an unlikely slip-up for a foreigner in any stage of English study or derangement. The word is nonetheless repeated throughout the book, much to the evident delight of Janet Maslin, who played with it in her review: "It is not flaccid to appreciate how quickly [the novel] takes flight," etc.

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This is hardly the first time that fans of contemporary fiction have shown themselves to be easily amused. The infantile exchanges that helped make *White Noise* the most highly praised comic novel of the 1980s would have impressed no one had they been spoken on the big screen. But the fuss over *Everything Is Illuminated*—a fuss not least inspired by a flatulent dog named Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior—makes the peculiarity of taste all the more striking. It may be that cinema buffs, with their far livelier interest in the masterpieces of the past, are in a better position than pomo readers to know originality when they see it. And judging from the healthy revenues of recent foreign movies, and the tiny, shrinking market for translated fiction, filmgoers are also a less America-centric bunch; for this reason, too, it is hard to imagine them being quite as tickled by Foer's funny-talking Slav as was (say) Prose, whose review twice referred to Ukrainians as Russians.

But most readers are also moviegoers, even if the converse does not apply. The interesting thing is that the same person who goes to see the film *The Brown Bunny*, and groans as the insects pile up on Vince Gallo's windshield, will curl up at home with *Everything Is Illuminated* and chuckle approvingly at finding the phrase "we are writing" printed 191 times in a row. (Such assuredness—and in one so young!) In short, two aesthetics often exist in the same mind: a moviegoing aesthetic that trusts primarily in personal taste and perception, and a reading aesthetic that is more likely to defer to established opinion. Which brings us back to the style that established opinion holds so dear.

As the architecture critic Charles Jencks has noted, and without hostility, nothing is less congenial to the enjoyment of a postmodern work than to approach it with a critical temper and a consciousness of the past. For decades, therefore, we readers have been urged, though not in so many words, to suspend our cultural literacy. Talk is of meeting the writer halfway, or of helping to create the work, this being allegedly more challenging than reading a "traditional" story. But in fact pomo readers

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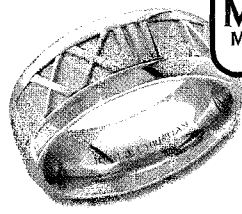

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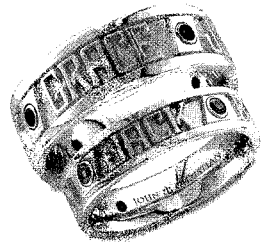

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work with their writers only in the sense that volunteers from an audience work with the stage hypnotist: emptying their minds from the start, smiling through one humiliation after another, and even working up a tear or two should this abruptly be demanded of them. The hoariest plot, the tritest message—these become acceptably highbrow as long as everything is tossed out in shreds that the reader, mentally falling on hands and knees, must piece together. Older fans of prizewinning fiction have been at the game for so long that their discernment has atrophied. Perhaps the younger ones never had much to begin with. Either way, the guilelessness that once had to be willed is now reflexive; and the self-styled literary reader laughs out loud at a farting dog.

Now Foer has produced a second novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, in which a starring role is again granted to a secondary sitcom character, this time the precocious child. Oskar, as the nine-year-old is called, sets out to find the lock that fits a key left behind by his father, who died in the World Trade Center on September 11. Here is the boy's calling card:

OSKAR SCHELL

INVENTOR, JEWELRY DESIGNER, JEWELRY FABRICATOR, AMATEUR ENTOMOLOGIST, FRANCOPHILE, VEGAN, ORIGAMIST, PACIFIST, PERCUSSIONIST, AMATEUR ASTRONOMER, COMPUTER CONSULTANT, AMATEUR ARCHEOLOGIST, COLLECTOR OF: *rare coins, butterflies that died natural deaths, miniature cacti, Beatles memorabilia, and semiprecious stones . . .*

E-MAIL: OSKAR_SCHELL@HOTMAIL.COM
HOME PHONE: PRIVATE
CELL PHONE: PRIVATE
FAX MACHINE: I DON'T HAVE A FAX MACHINE YET

Note the strenuously disarming naiveté of that last line, and how it jars with the rest. Just as Alex combined a solid grasp of English grammar with an unerring instinct for the most ludicrous of a dozen thesaurus alternatives, so Oskar sounds like a sweet preschooler and a pompous college student at the same time—which is to say that he never seems human for a moment. Though eager to impress us with the lad's imagination, Foer can think of nothing better than to offer page after

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page of whimsical ideas for innovations, thus stirring memories of Mark Leyner's *Tooth Imprints on a Corn Dog* (1995), a once hyped novel full of musings about talking breakfast cereals and the like. Oskar: What if seeing-eye dogs were also drug-sniffing dogs? And since we don't have wings, what if we had bird-seed shirts? What if we swallowed little microphones that played the sounds of our hearts through speakers?

> I wonder if everyone's hearts would start to beat at the same time, like how women who live together have their menstrual periods at the same time, which I know about, but don't really want to know about. That would be so weird, except that the place in the hospital where babies are born would sound like a crystal chandelier in a houseboat, because the babies wouldn't have had time to match up their heartbeats yet.

Could anything sound less like a tinkling chandelier than a roomful of amplified heartbeats? Young boys are too sensible to write in such a fashion; that sort of thing comes with age, and an M.F.A. Note also how Foer tries to get away with that line about menstruation. He claims a child's point of view, the better to get everyone sniffling later on, but he won't accept the narrative discipline that comes with it. Presumably his readers will let this pass; the pomo writer's imagination must be freed from the tethers of mere realism if it is to float up to higher truths, like wouldn't it be nice if 9/11 hadn't happened?

What may hurt the book even with its intended audience are the various diversions that both writer and publisher seem to have thought would constitute a selling point. Some pages are filled with numbers, some with illegible tangles of print; there are pages with galley corrections circled in red, and a page with the words "green," "purple," and "blue" printed in the appropriate colors. There are big black-and-white photos: a doorknob, the back of someone's head, the back of someone else's head, a pair of mating tortoises. One page is blank but for the words "Ha ha ha" printed dead-center, while another says, and with a less sincere ring, "I'm sorry." At the end are eleven consecutive photographs of a man falling from what appears to be one of the World Trade Center's towers; when the pages are flipped through, the body looks as if it is rising. Never mind the poor taste; never mind the story about losing a father and finding a grandfather, which would elicit sneers from critics if the cover had *The Key* on it and Nicholas Sparks's name underneath. The remarkable thing is that a substantial part of the book is designed to be only glanced at. If this is a new trend in "alternative" fiction, I would like to see it encouraged.

JASON SCHNEIDER

READING LIST

RETAIL THERAPY

Five fictional reasons not to pay full price

BY SALLY SINGER

Dancing Girls and Other Stories, *by Margaret Atwood* (1977). In "Hair Jewelry" (originally published in a 1976 issue of Ms.) a doctoral student readies herself for a doomed tryst with trips to Filene's Basement for a winter coat and a red baby-doll nightgown. Brilliantly evocative of the psychology of discount shoppers ("No one went there who did not aspire to a shape-change, a transformation, a new life, but the things never did quite fit"), and offering perhaps the first literary reference to the off-price designer-goods emporium, Atwood's story is also, incidentally, quietly perceptive about the Gothic nature of first loves.

A Pair of Silk Stockings and Other Stories, *by Kate Chopin* (1996). The title story, from 1897, tells how self-denying Mrs. Sommers, "who knew the value of bargains," went shopping for a few sturdy basics for her children and found herself distracted and flushed by silk stockings, reduced from $2.50 to $1.98. The upgrade in her hosiery (from cotton to silk) leads to further purchases: new boots, new kid gloves, fancy magazines. Chopin's gentle little tale about the addictive nature of luxury goods seems particularly resonant today: who hasn't entered Barneys for a pair of tights, only to exit head-to-toe in Prada?

Diary of a Provincial Lady, *by E. M. Delafield* (1930). Delafield's novelistic dispatches from Devon are written with a Braudelian attention to the material culture of daily life—in this instance the everyday trappings of a modern-minded, village-bound land agent's wife. Braudel found the first representation of a fork in art; Delafield offers the first of a gift certificate. While Christmas shopping, the Provincial Lady reads in a weekly that a "Giver with Restricted Means" should "let originality of thought … add character to trifling offering" by purchasing sets of beauty treatments (six for five guineas) at Madame Dolly Varden's Beauty Parlour, in Piccadilly. "Cannot visualise myself making this offer to Our Vicar's Wife," she writes, "and decide to confine myself to one-and-sixpenny calendar with picture of sunset on Scaw Fell, as usual." Bless her.

Ulysses, *by James Joyce* (1922). Who could fault Gerty MacDowell, the limping young woman who inspires Bloom to masturbate before her, for gaining a certain confidence from her purchase of egg-blue chenille at the Clery's summer sale? Joyce offers a sympathetic glimpse into the empowering nature of fashion wisely bought.

I'll Take It, *by Paul Rudnick* (1989). This early comic novel by the playwright and screenwriter tells the story of Joe Reckler, a gay Jewish son, and—who else?—his mother and her sisters on a trip to the L. L. Bean outlet store in Maine. They are a family of shoppers, who "career tchotchke-hunt," pay regular visits to favorite merchandise ("at any moment an item might shudder, gulp, and go on sale"), and see it as their duty to convert New England WASPs to the pleasures of discount, from first reduction to five-finger. Rudnick's novel is affectionate and shticky, and wickedly perceptive about consumer/status culture in eighties Manhattan, when everything was literally up for grabs.

Sally Singer is the fashion news and features director at Vogue.

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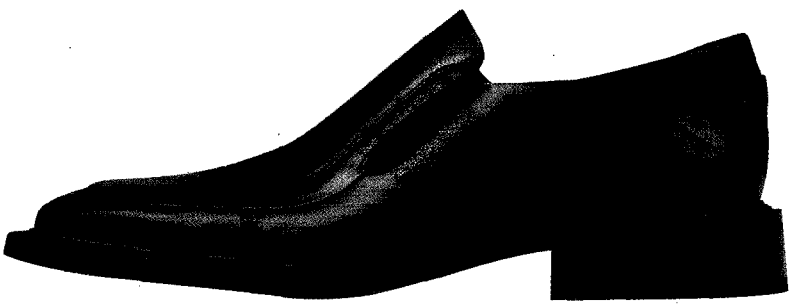

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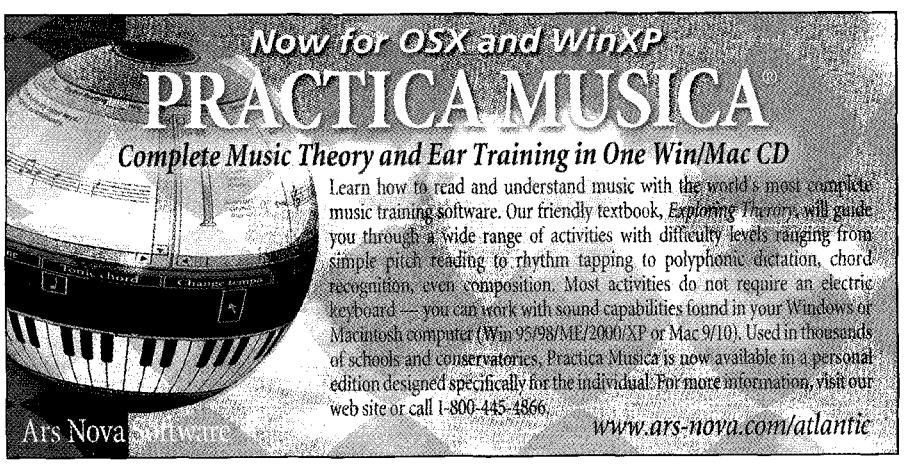

Those who liked Foer's first novel will no doubt feel otherwise. Part of postmodernism's appeal has always derived from the drudgery of its spurious playfulness, a drudgery that, while requiring no real thought, makes its followers feel that they are dealing with something too difficult for the herd. Alexi-stop-spleening-me! wouldn't have been found quite as amusing—not as "literarily" amusing, at least—had his gag not been belabored a dozen times a page. (By praising *Everything Is Illuminated*'s climax as a "pay-off," Janet Maslin tacitly admitted the grueling nature of the fun and games leading up to it.) Not that *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* doesn't have longueurs of its own.

> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> People waving shirts out of high windows.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Bodies falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> People covered in gray dust.
> Bodies falling.
> Buildings falling.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Planes going into buildings.
> Buildings falling.

Even the most submissive readers will skim that passage (which goes on and on), but they can at least pretend that it was meant to be taken slowly and respectfully. Not long afterward, though, is a two-page photograph of a man's palms, one with YES written on it and the other with NO, as if the author's verbal description of just such a pair of hands left too much to the imagination. After a while the gimmickry starts to remind one of a clown frantically yanking toys out of his sack: a fatal image. This book may occasion talk of sophomore jinxes, but if anything, *Extremely Loud* is a bolder and more historically significant novel than its predecessor. At last a writer has taken to its logical conclusion the aesthetic that John Barth invoked with a smirk at the start of his novel *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966): "You've got to become as a kindergartener again." Doesn't seem quite so funny now, does it?

B. R. Myers is a contributing editor of The Atlantic *and the author of* A Reader's Manifesto.

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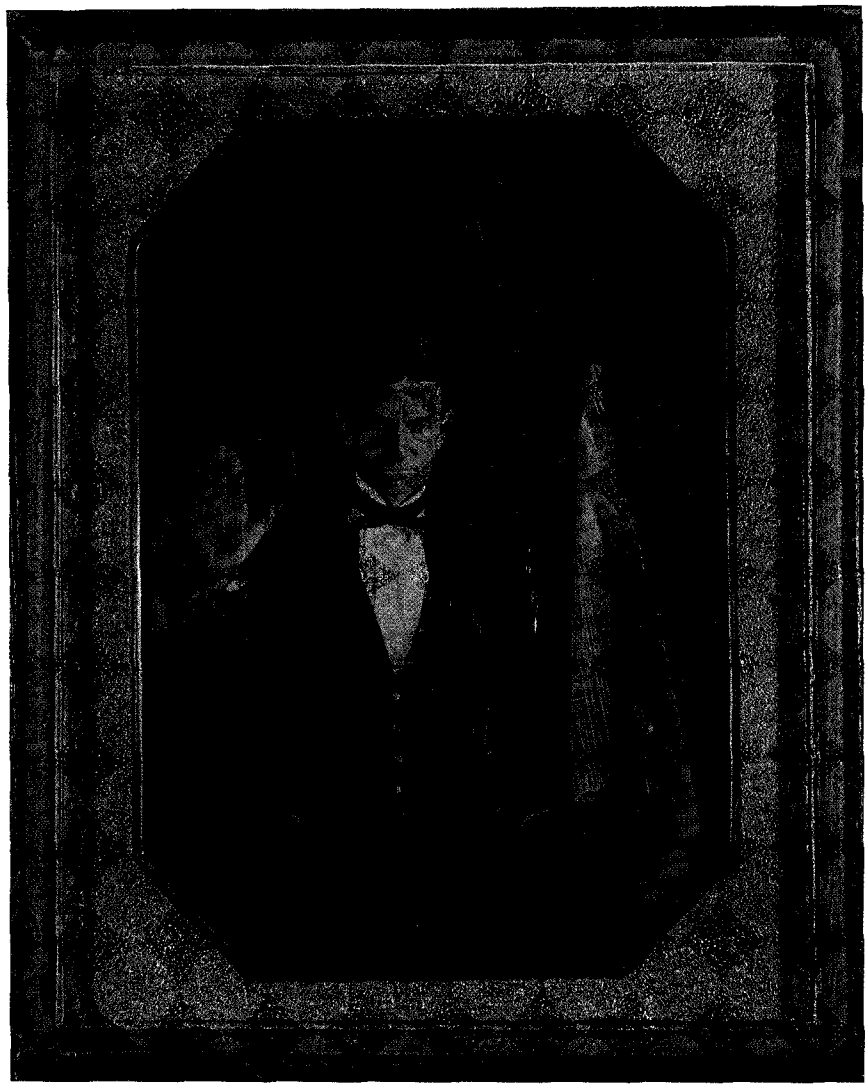
BOOKS

The Man Who Ended Slavery

Slandered by craven abolitionists as unhinged, John Brown was in fact an eloquent, cool-headed tactician who succeeded in his long-range plan: launching a civil war

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS



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When Abraham Lincoln gave an audience to Harriet Beecher Stowe, he is supposed to have greeted her by saying that she was the little woman who had started this great war. That fondly related anecdote illustrates the persistent tendency to Parson Weemsishness in our culture. It was not at all the tear-jerking sentiment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that catalyzed the War Between the States. It was, rather, the blood-spilling intransigence of John Brown, field-tested on the pitiless Kansas prairies and later deployed at Harpers Ferry. And John Brown was a man whom Lincoln assiduously disowned, until the time came when he himself was compelled to adopt the policy of "war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt," as partisans of the slaveocracy had hitherto been too proud of saying.

David Reynolds sets himself to counter several misapprehensions about the pious old buzzard (Brown, I mean, not Lincoln). Among these are the impressions that he was a madman, that he was a homicidal type, and that his assault on a federal arsenal was foredoomed and quixotic. The critical thing here is context. And the author succeeds admirably in showing that Brown, far from being a crazed fanatic, was a serious legatee of the English and American revolutions who anticipated the Emancipation Proclamation and all that has ensued from it.

Until 1850, perhaps, the "peculiar institution" of slavery might have had a chance of perpetuating itself indefinitely by compromise. But the exorbitance and arrogance of "the slave power" forbade this accommodation. Not content with preserving their own domain in its southeastern redoubt, the future Confederates insisted on extending their chattel system into new territories, and on implicating the entire Union in their system. The special symbol of this hubris was the Fugitive Slave Act, which legalized the recovery of human property from "free" states. The idea of secession or separation first arose among abolitionists confronted with this monstrous imposition. Men like William Lloyd Garrison took their text from the Book of Isaiah, describing the U.S. Constitution as a "covenant with death and an agreement with hell," and exhorting their supporters to "come out now and be separate." (This hermeneutic rejectionism, incidentally, is identical to that preached today by Ian Paisley and the Presbyterian hard-liners of Northern Ireland.)

JOHN BROWN, ABOLITIONIST: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights
by David S. Reynolds
Knopf

The proto-libertarian and anarchist Lysander Spooner argued that nowhere did the Constitution explicitly endorse slavery. It was for defenders of the values of 1776 and 1789 to help the slaves overthrow an illegitimate tyranny. In this he had the support of the Republican Frederick Douglass, who also wanted the United States to live up to its founding documents rather than to nullify or negate them. Meanwhile, the Democrats were unashamed advocates of the extension of slavery, and Lincoln was willing to submit to one humiliation after another in order, as he never tired of saying, "to preserve the Union."

John Brown could effortlessly outdo Garrison in any biblical condemnation of slavery. He could also easily surpass Lysander Spooner in his zeal to encourage and arm what the authorities called

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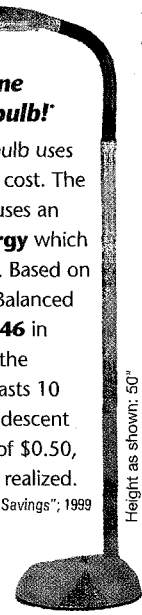

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"servile insurrection." He strongly agreed with Douglass that the Union should be preserved and not dissolved. But he was incapable of drawing up any balance sheet between "preservation" and gradual emancipation, because he saw quite plainly that the balance was going the other way, and that the slave power was influencing and subordinating the North, rather than the other way about. Thus, despite his commitment to the Union, he was quite ready to regard the federal government as an enemy.

Originally a New Englander (and possibly a *Mayflower* descendant), Brown appeared to adopt and exemplify the adamant Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards, with his strict insistence on predestination and the "elect" and his vivid belief in eternal punishment for sinners. Reynolds gives some hair-raising examples of the culture of corporal punishment and cruel austerity that ruled Brown's own upbringing and the raising of his twenty children, and it is easy to see how such a combination of dogma and discipline might have given rise to the persistent rumor that he was partly unhinged (more than one of his sons became mentally disturbed). However, the story of his longer evolution makes this speculation a highly unsafe one.

For all his attachment to Calvinist orthodoxy, Brown felt himself very close to the transcendental school of Emerson and Thoreau. He formed important friendships in this circle, and relied on a "Secret Six" committee of supporters in Massachusetts, who stood ready to provide money and even weapons for his projects. He can hardly have been unaware of the religious heterodoxy of this group; and when it came to the no less critical matter of choosing his immediate entourage of radical would-be guerrillas, he readily included Jews, Indians, Paine-ite deists, and agnostics. Most of all, however, he insisted on including blacks. This at once distinguished him from most abolitionists, who preferred to act "for" the slaves rather than with them. But Brown had made a friendship with a slave boy at the age of twelve, and would appear to have undergone a Huck Finn–like experience in the recognition of a common humanity. Later he studied the life and

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tactics of Nat Turner, and of the rebellious Haitian Toussaint L'Ouverture, and decided that a full-scale revolt of the oppressed, rather than any emancipation from above, was the need of the hour.

I was very much interested to learn that his other great hero was Oliver Cromwell, whose "New Model Army" had swept away profane kingship in England and established a Puritan regime. The revisionist view of Cromwell as a liberator rather than a regicide was the work of Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s, and a result of Carlyle's friendship with Emerson. The American writer Joel Tyler Headley "recycled" Carlyle, as Reynolds phrases it, for the American mass market, portraying Cromwell as an ancestor of the American Revolution as well as a synthesizer of "religion, republicanism, and violence." (It seems probable that Brown got his introduction to Cromwell from Headley rather than directly from Carlyle: I cannot easily imagine him esteeming the Carlyle who apostatized from Calvinism, let alone the Carlyle who, in justifying slavery in the West Indies in 1850, published "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Reynolds does not discuss this awkward paradox.)

Reynolds focuses on the three most sanguinary and dramatic episodes in Brown's career: the engagements at Pottawatomie and Osawatomie, in Kansas, and the culminating battle at Harpers Ferry. To read this extended account is to appreciate that Brown, far from being easily incited to rage and rashness, was capable of playing a very long game. He was naturally drawn to Kansas, because it had become the battleground state in a Union that was half slave and half free. The pro-slavery settlers and infiltrators from Missouri were determined to colonize the territory and to pack its polling booths, and in this they often had the indulgence of decrepit and cowardly presidents, including Franklin Pierce. Until the appearance of Brown and his men on the scene, the slave power had had things mostly its own way, and was accustomed to using any method it saw fit. After the murder of the abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy, and especially after the famous assault on Senator Charles Sumner by Representative Preston Brooks, Brown decided on a reprisal raid, and slew several leading pro-slavery Kansans in the dead of night. There is no question that this represented only a small installment of payback, though Reynolds nervously characterizes it as "terrorism" and spends a great deal of time and ink in partly rationalizing the deed.

The superfluity of this is easily demonstrated. Not only had the slave-

NEW FICTION

Finds and flops

BY JOSEPH O'NEILL

Whatever surnominal adjective Kazuo Ishiguro finally bequeaths us (Ishiguronian? Ishiguronic?), its meaning is surely settled: suggestive of an emotionally hampered, stuffily self-expressive individual—a Japanese from the imperial days, say, or a butler, or a buttoned-up British private detective—who unreliably surveys his or her personal past to tragic effect. Peeping through the lowered venetians of yesteryear (recollection as a species of voyeurism is very Ishiguro), the retrovert is privy to a series of partial visions that eventually reveal a life guided by calamitous misapprehension on his part. True, Ishiguro's fourth novel, *The Unconsoled*, gleefully dynamited this formula; but his fifth, *When We Were Orphans*, saw a return to familiar methods and preoccupations—in particular the perilous importance of nostalgia, and the loss of childhood's blissful expectancy and ignorance. As Schopenhauer put it, "In our early youth we sit before the life that lies ahead of us like children sitting before the curtain in a theatre, in happy and tense anticipation of whatever is going to appear. Luckily we do not know what really will appear."

NEVER LET ME GO

by Kazuo Ishiguro

Knopf

This treacherous species of good fortune is horrifically central to *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro's sixth novel. Our narrator—Kathy H., a woman in her thirties—reviews the idyll that was her time at Hailsham, a boarding school for boys and girls in the English countryside. Her curiously juvenile prattle—"The way it began, it was a bit like a repeat of earlier," she begins one anecdote—and her worshipful obsession with all things Hailshamite quickly make it clear that Kathy, if not demented, is at least imperfectly removed from her schoolgirl self; and as she rabbits on, the oddness of her schooldays becomes increasingly apparent. Why are the teachers called "guardians"? Who is the mysterious "Madame" who appears from time to time to collect samples of the students' creative work? Why are there no parents to be seen? And what are we to make of Kathy's mysterious grown-up occupation as a "carer" for ailing "donors"? Something creepy is clearly afoot.

It transpires—well, here I must collude with the artist to keep his work's monstrous secret. Suffice it to say that Ishiguro serves up the saddest, most persuasive science fiction you'll read. Set in "England, late 1990s," the novel posits a technological breakthrough whose effect is to condemn the children of Hailsham to a fate that was, until this novel, unthinkable. Ishiguro's imagining of the children's misshapen little world is profoundly thoughtful, and their hesitant progression into knowledge of their plight is an extreme and heartbreaking version of the exodus of all children from the innocence in which the benevolent but fraudulent adult world conspires to place them. We grow up—if we're lucky—in security and wonder, and afterward are delivered to the grotesque fact of our end. And then? Ishiguro's dark answer is that the modern desperation regarding death, combined with technological advances and the natural human capacity for self-serving fictions and evasions (look no further than our see-no-evil consumption of animals), could easily give rise to new varieties of socially approved atrocities; one of the many Nietzschean insights of the novel is that successful crimes produce mutations in morality. With its fantastic, inky bleakness, *Never Let Me Go* itself mutates the meaning of "Ishiguroish," or "Ishiguroesque," or whatever epithet sticks to this wonderful writer.

Joseph O'Neill is working on his third novel, The Brooklyn Dream Game.

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NEW FICTION

Finds and flops

BY JON ZOBENICA

It takes time, clearly, to make sense of a novel in which a half-wit converses with cats and causes fish to rain from the sky. In which Johnnie Walker (yes, that Johnnie Walker) has a cameo as a kitty-killing fiend, and Colonel Sanders (yep, that one) appears as a cosmic flesh peddler, serving up a delightful, Hegel-quoting whore. In which a fifteen-year-old father-hating runaway named Kafka (luckily, not that Kafka) undertakes a multidimensional love affair with a woman almost certainly his mother, and gets a little on the side from a girl almost certainly his sister. Perhaps it needn't be said that this meta-fictional fun house isn't perfect, but underpinning it all is a surprisingly patient, deeply affecting meditation on perfection itself, specifically romantic perfection—the obsessive greed in pursuing it, the selfish isolation that comes from achieving it, the soul-killing (and also selfish) grief of outliving it, of being left, inevitably, with nothing but its fading memory. Recalling the "private paradise" of her own lost love, the aforementioned mother, a virtual and sometimes actual wraith, says, "I had something too complete, too perfect, once, and afterward all I could do was despise myself." Fortunately, Murakami, unlike his female lead, never surrenders to gorgeous despair, and instead celebrates life's imperfections, its partial and transient relationships, and its unintended consequences as blessings in disguise—vital to tolerance and adaptability, and therefore to imagination and even sanity.

KAFKA ON THE SHORE

by Haruki Murakami

Knopf

Hence this tale of two people's struggles to escape/fulfill an unknowingly shared fate is at once absurdly fun and highly sentimental. Murakami's voice—detached but not indifferent, sympathetic but never mawkish—comes through most clearly in that of a supporting character, a young androgyne librarian, who says to Kafka, "A certain type of perfection can only be realized through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect. And personally, I find that encouraging." Perfect.

Jon Zobenica is a staff editor at The Atlantic.

holders perpetrated the preponderance of atrocities, and with impunity at that, but they had begun to boast that northerners and New Englanders were congenitally soft and altogether lacking in "chivalric" and soldierly qualities. What could be more apt than that they should encounter John Brown, careless of his own safety and determined to fill the ungodly with the fear of the risen Christ? Every Cavalier should meet such a Roundhead. After Pottawatomie the swagger went out of the southerners, and after the more conventional fighting at Osawatomie, and Brown's cool-headed raid to liberate a group of slaves and take them all the way to Canada, they came to realize that they were in a hard fight. Furthermore, their sulfurous reaction to this discovery, and their stupid tendency to paint Brown as an agent of the Republican Party, made it harder and harder for the invertebrate Lincolnians to keep the issue of slavery under control.

John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry was the first defeat, as it was also the seminal victory, of a triumphant cause, precisely because it sounded a trumpet that could never call retreat.

In his work in Kansas, and his long toil on the Underground Railroad, Brown was essentially mounting a feint. He knew that subscribers and supporters in New England would give him money, and even arms, for these limited and shared objectives. But he wanted to divert the money, and the arms, to the larger purpose of making any further Lincolnian retreats and compromises impossible. For years he had been studying the keystone town of Harpers Ferry, situated at the confluence of the Shenandoah and the Potomac, and handily placed for the potentially guerrilla-friendly Allegheny Mountains.

Reynolds shows that the strategic design was not as quixotic as one has often been led to believe. This northwestern portion of Virginia was generally sympathetic to abolition and to the Union (indeed, its later cleaving into the new free state of West Virginia, in 1862, is the only secession from that epoch that still survives). The fall months were the harvest season, when disaffection among overdriven slaves was more general. And the national political climate was becoming more febrile and polarized.

Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry failed badly, of course, but the courage and bearing he demonstrated after his humiliating defeat were of an order to impress his captors, who announced that far from being "mad," their prisoner was lucid and eloquent as well as brave. The slander of insanity was circulated by the weaker members of the anti-slavery camp, who cringingly sought to avoid the identification with Brown that the southern press had opportunistically made. By falling for its own propaganda, however, and in the general panic that followed the botched insurrection, the South persuaded itself that war was inevitable and that Lincoln (who had denounced Brown in his campaign against Douglas and in his famous speech at Cooper Union) was a Brown-ite at heart. The history of the six years after 1859 is the history not so much of Brown's prophecy as of the self-fulfilling prophecy of his enemies. As Reynolds hauntingly words it,

> The officer who supervised the capture of Brown was Robert E. Lee ... Lee's retreat from the decisive battle of Gettysburg would pass over the same road that Brown took to Harpers Ferry on the night of his attack. The lieutenant who demanded Brown's surrender was J.E.B. Stuart, later Lee's celebrated cavalry officer. Among the officers who supervised at Brown's hanging was Thomas Jackson, soon to become the renowned "Stonewall." Among the soldiers at Brown's execution was a dashing Southern actor, John Wilkes Booth.

If this does not vindicate Brown's view that all had been predestined by the Almighty before the world was made, it nonetheless does do something to the hair on the back of one's neck. As do the words finally uttered in Lincoln's

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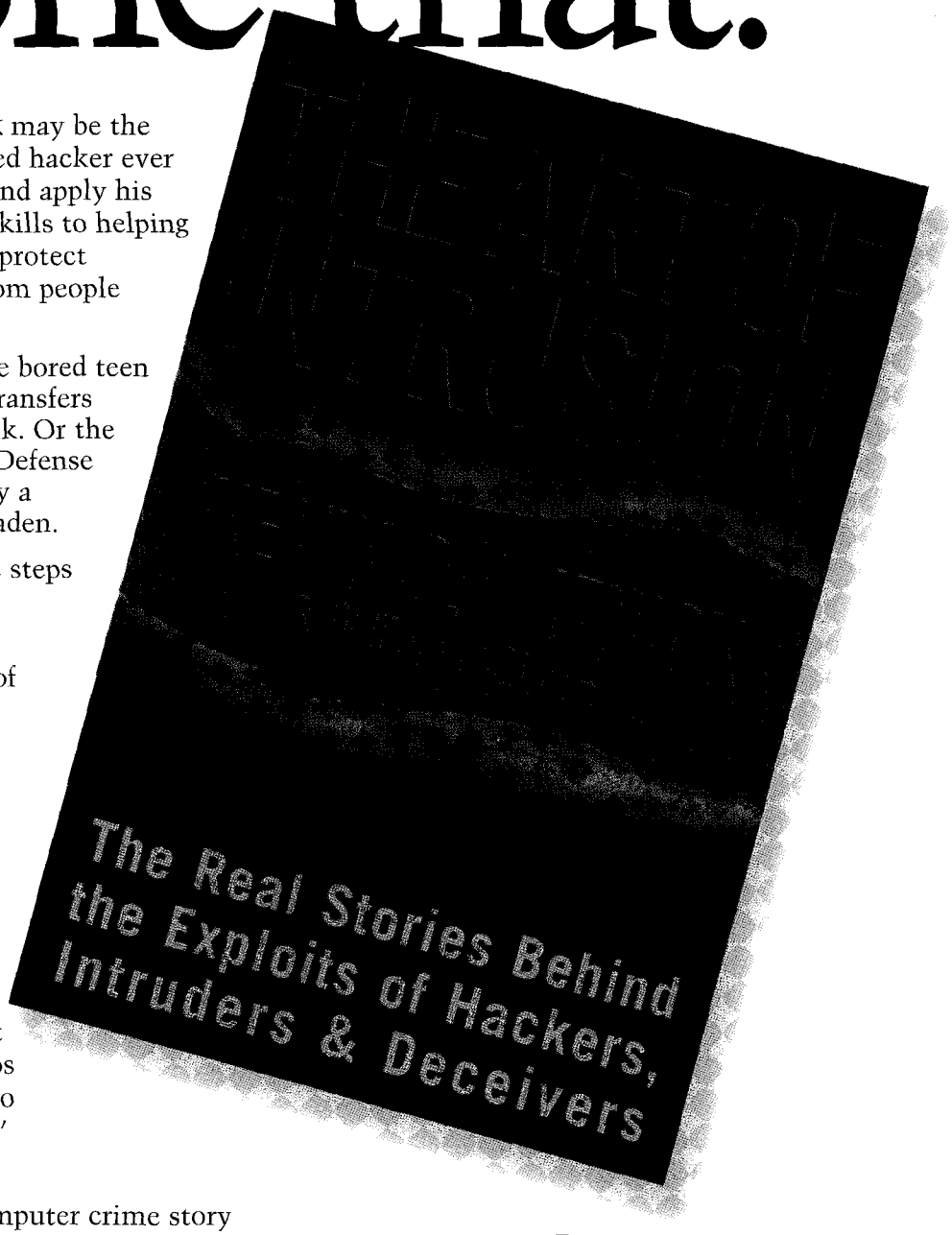

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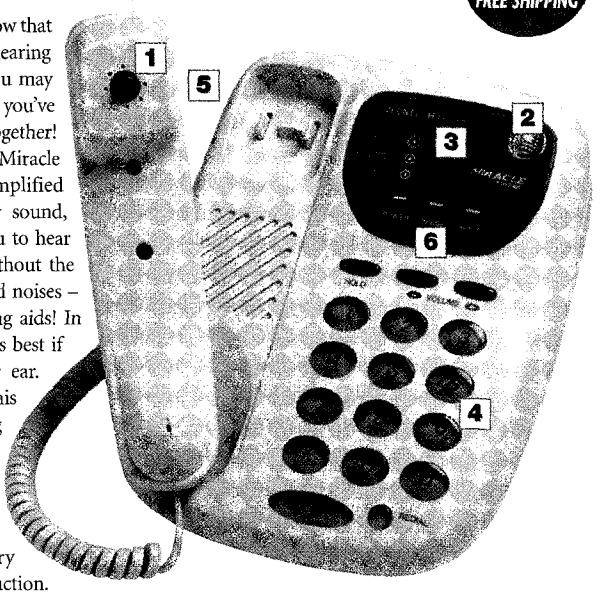

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Second Inaugural, about every drop of blood drawn by the lash being repaid by the sword, and the utter destruction of the piled-up wealth of those who live by the bondsman's toil. The final reckoning with slavery and secession was described by Lincoln himself as one great "John Brown raid" into the South, and was on a scale that would have brought a wintry smile to the stern face of Oliver Cromwell. The "Marseillaise" of that crusade ("The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which first appeared, as did many other important documents of the Brown-Emerson alliance, in the pages of this magazine) was an adaptation of the foot soldiers' song about Old Osawatomie Brown. One reserves the term "quixotic" for hopeless causes. Harpers Ferry was the first defeat, as it was also the seminal victory, of a triumphant cause, precisely because it sounded a trumpet that could never call retreat.

So much for the apocalyptic and, if you like, "transcendental" influence of Brown. Reynolds, building on the earlier work of Merrill Peterson, traces another, gentler influence that may be no less consequential. Almost all whites in that epoch feared almost all blacks. And many blacks resented the condescension of anti-slavery organizations—most especially those groups that wanted to free them and then deport them to Africa. John Brown shared his life with slaves, and re-wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution so as to try to repair the hideous wrong that had been done to them. (In issuing these documents, by the way, he exculpated himself from any ahistorical charge of "terrorism," which by definition offers nothing programmatic.) The record shows that admiration for Brown was intense, widespread, and continuous, from Douglass to DuBois and beyond. Our world might be a good deal worse than it is had not numberless African-Americans, from that day to this, taken John Brown as proof that fraternity and equality, as well as liberty, were feasible things and could be exemplified by real people.

Christopher Hitchens is a contributing editor of The Atlantic *and a columnist for* Vanity Fair.

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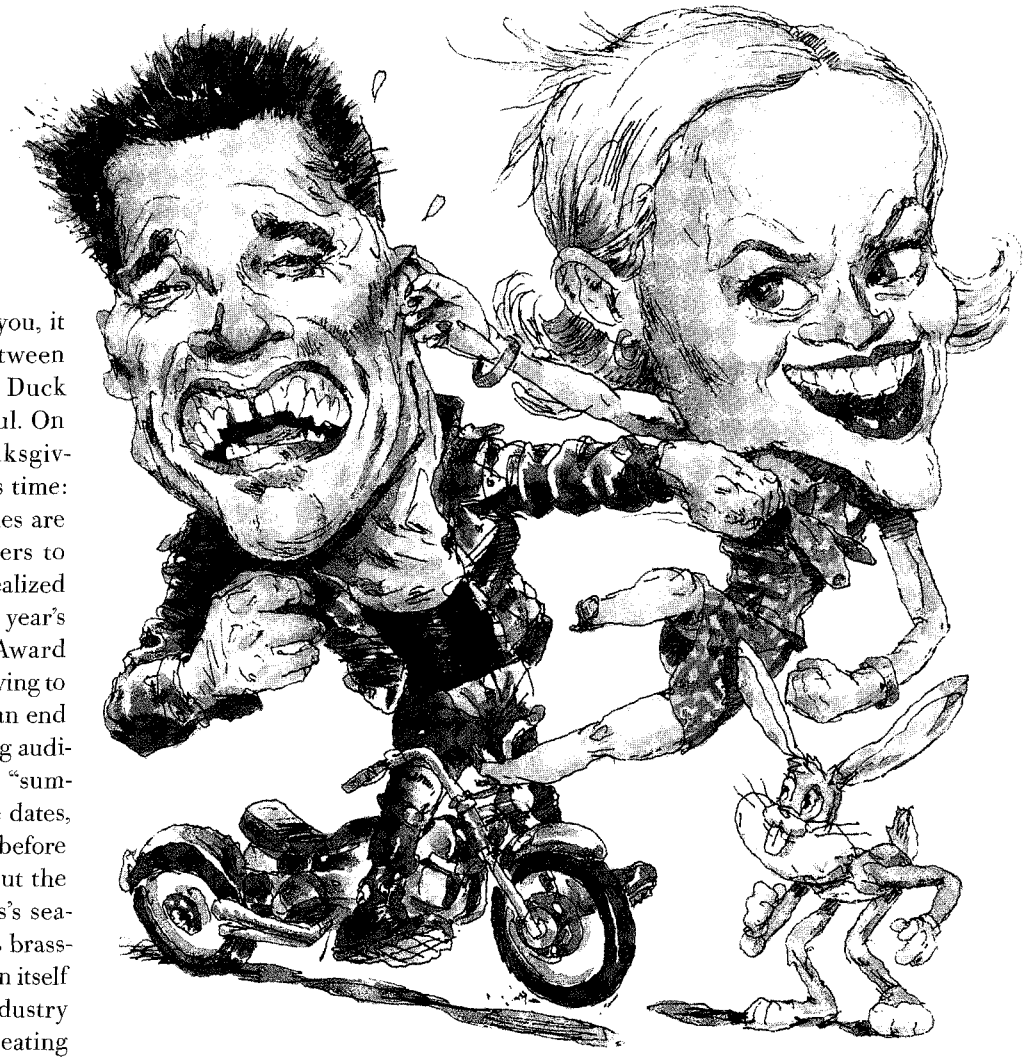
BOOKS

The Big Shill

Hollywood's need for hits creates a culture of misses

BY TOM CARSON



JOHN CUNEO

If the movie business baffles you, it helps to understand that between them Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck define Hollywood's divided soul. On the industry's calendar, Thanksgiving to New Year's Day is Daffy's time: his perennially thwarted schemes are always about getting bystanders to agree with his preposterously idealized self-image, and that's when each year's lumberingly noble Academy Award contenders crowd marquees, striving to turn artistic prestige into both an end in itself and a means of attracting audiences. But summer—or, rather, "summer" (in terms of actual release dates, the multiplex version now starts before Memorial Day and is all over but the shouting by mid-July)—is Bugs's season in the sun, wherein profit is brassily conceived as not only an end in itself but also a means of gaining industry prestige, otherwise known as beating the competition. Needless to say, Bugs idealizes nothing except success.

Today's 800-pound Daffy—the heir to Samuel Goldwyn's mighty quacking—is Miramax head Harvey Weinstein, since he clearly won't rest until his company's Oscars are numerous enough to do battle with the emperor Qin Shihuang's terra-cotta army. But the Bugs side of movies is the subject of Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing's first-rate *Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession.* It is published, let us note, by Miramax Books, which may or may not irritate the rival studios being scrutinized, but does remind us that Harvey is sentimental enough to think that having an eponymous print division confers classiness. In contrast, Rupert Murdoch probably has to pinch himself on most days even to remember he owns HarperCollins.

Hayes and Bing's opus doesn't live up to its pop-sociological subtitle. The audience's internalization of industry yardsticks of success, a phenomenon to delight behavioral scientists, is only fleetingly discussed. But that's no real cause for regret, because what these two have actually produced is a classic look at Hollywood in the age of box-office megabucks—a book to set alongside Lillian Ross's *Picture,* John Gregory Dunne's *The Studio,* and Steven Bach's *Final Cut,* the best of a genre that ought to be more crowded. In a culture as media-driven as this one, finding out what goes into the entertainment we consume can be every bit as educational as it was to learn from Upton Sinclair how the meatpacking industry did its thing.

OPEN WIDE: How Hollywood Box Office Became a National Obsession
by Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing
Miramax Books

The only alarm bells the authors want to set off, however, are in the biz itself, which will almost certainly mistake the sound for wind chimes. Briskly, knowledgeably, and often wittily, *Open Wide* puts the inanities of Hollywood's conventional wisdom on display by tracking the fortunes—from inception to the shouting—of the following three summer-2003 releases, which had nothing in common except premieres timed for the high-profile July 4 weekend and the hopes their respective studios had riding on them. *Terminator 3* was Arnold Schwarzenegger's belated return, on the way to Sacramento, to his signature role as a cyborg; *Legally Blonde 2* was Reese Witherspoon's reprise of her star-making turn as Elle Woods; and eventual last-place finisher *Sinbad* was DreamWorks SKG honcho Jeffrey Katzenberg's attempt to out-Disney Disney, his former employer, at the traditional animated features that DreamWorks's own all-computerized *Shrek* had just helped define as old hat. As each of these behemoths staggers toward the starting gate, the triple nar-

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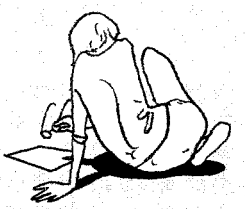
A CLOSE READ

What makes good writing good

BY CHRISTINA SCHWARZ



She goes to Eileen, stopping by after work. Eileen makes instant and listens without judging or giving advice. Patty knows she won't discuss it with her mother—maybe Cy, but he's safe, Eileen would never forgive him if he told anyone. As if to make things even, Eileen offers her a secret: they're getting married.

In June. Nothing fancy, just a small ceremony at their old church and a reception for friends at the Moose Lodge. —from **The Good Wife**, by Stewart O'Nan (Farrar Straus & Giroux)

Stewart O'Nan gets his characters to tell their own stories. He keeps the vocabulary colloquial—"stopping by," "makes instant," "make things even," "listens without judging" (pop-culture shorthand for the attitude now expected of a confidante). The way he builds his sentences captures the leapfrogging, occasionally ungrammatical style of real people's real thoughts: "maybe Cy" instead of "she might tell Cy," for instance. Of course, this naturalness is an illusion (a transcript of thought and conversation would yield mostly a slop of imprecision and repetition), but O'Nan's fingerprints are unobtrusive. He uses a dangling participial phrase (a favorite device of his) to good effect in the first sentence, separating the key information—Patty's need for Eileen—from the mere logistics that trail after it. The easy, rolling rhythm of this construction, and its slightly meandering quality, remind the reader that this is a story, not a recitation of facts. The word "offers" later in the passage underscores the idea that sharing an intimacy is a generous attempt to keep the relationship equal; though in no way jarring (O'Nan is never jarring), it betrays the writer at work simply because, unlike conversational language, it's so apt. The final two "sentences" nicely exemplify his contrived naturalness. The bursts of particulars are Eileen's answers, just the way she might deliver them, but Patty's prompts are only implied, for the passage would drag if it were presented as dialogue, weighed down by the obvious questions. Instead, with striking economy O'Nan infuses these lines with the liveliness of conversation; drives the story forward with the promise of future events; reminds the reader of Eileen's unpretentiousness; brings Patty's sorrow (her own husband is in prison) into bold relief; and even demonstrates how sensitive Eileen is to Patty's feelings, in that she reveals, without enthusiasm, only the most basic details of the sort of plans a woman is expected to gush over.

Christina Schwarz is the author of the novels Drowning Ruth *and* All Is Vanity.

rative develops into a fascinating examination of the pseudo-methodical lunacy—geared to second-guess every aspect of a project except whether it was worthwhile in the first place—shaping each creative (i.e., marketing) decision along the way. At the same time, we're given an eye-opening tour of all the practicalities involved in manufacturing and selling summer blockbusters, from the etiquette of press junkets and the 24/7 hum of the Technicolor warehouse where the posters and trailers are processed to the inner workings, midway between *Metropolis* and Rube Goldberg, of today's twenty-two- and thirty-screen megaplexes.

Another quality shared by Hayes and Bing's chosen movies is that they turned out to be inconsequential—failing even to register as pop events, which is how summer blockbusters achieve cultural salience. Not even *T3*, the biggest brand name here (and the winner, for what little it's worth besides dollar signs, of that year's July 4 box-office contest), has stayed in moviegoers' memories, except as a suitably bizarre prelude to its star's entry into politics. Yet that doesn't make the book any less interesting. After all, the great irony of rabbit season versus duck season is that the supposedly more thoughtful movies, the ones that put Hollywood's best face forward, with their unctuous production values and hazy sensitivity, are by and large not only equally forgettable but also more meaningless: they don't tell us as much about who we are.

Face it, when tomorrow's cultural historians get down to pegging that elusive nineties zeitgeist, they aren't likely to waste time pondering *The English Patient*, *Shakespeare in Love*, or *American Beauty*, three vacuously "classy" Best Picture winners that touched on absolutely nothing of any moment to the public. But they'll be agog at the cornucopia of revealing intimations in the decade's definitive summer movie, 1996's stupid/profound sci-fi epic *Independence Day*. With its fighter-pilot president leading ragtag patriots to victory, its startling equation of America's fortunes with those of the planet at large, and its berserk fantasies of revenge on literally dehumanized enemies, *ID4*—to use the movie's post-literate shorthand title, itself a brilliant piece of advance branding—foreshadowed the absolutism of the George W. Bush era as surely as the success of *Star Wars* in 1977 augured Reagan's rise. Curiously, *Terminator 3*, which drew on the same stock of ragged-glory imagery *after* 9/11, didn't get nearly as much oomph out of it.

Yet when a commercial movie ends up being expressive, it's usually by accident. And since Hollywood is disquieted by flukes—which even when they're hugely profitable are terrifying reminders that nobody knows anything—the industry's traditional reaction to them is to try to formalize their ingredients into sure things. The original *Legally Blonde*, for instance, was a tossed-together, feckless movie that connected thanks to Reese Witherspoon's ransacking of her formidable bag of tricks to communicate vivacity—the kind of acting that never wins awards, even though few things are harder than making a piece of floss work with no help from the script. But by the sequel expectations were through the roof, the actress's asking price had gone up to $15 million (only $5 million less than the first film's entire budget), and panic was in the air. As a result, *LB2*'s failure—despite a perfectly respectable box-office take—to outperform its pred-

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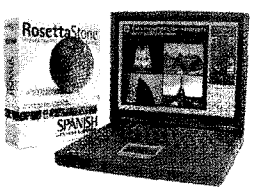

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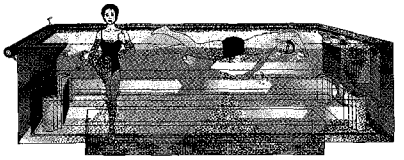

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ecessor was a disappointment that Hollywoodites promptly converted into a debacle. "A sniper bullet through the heart of a franchise," one marketing exec called the sequel, which is a dizzying example of insider delirium; it's the addition of that little word "sniper" that transforms the rhetoric from merely excessive to unhinged.

If *Picture* had a weakness, it was Lillian Ross's complacent assumption that John Huston's lackluster adaptation of *The Red Badge of Courage*—an essentially unfilmable novel, since its surface actions don't add up to much without Crane's insights into the hero's mental state—would have been a masterpiece if not for the studio's interference. That familiar conflict, the defining cliché of most moviemaking sagas, doesn't really come up here; the kind of people who get hired to assemble contraptions like *Terminator 3* and *Legally Blonde 2* don't have creative priorities at odds with the business. At most they're haggling with "the suits"—a term that flatters its users by preserving an all but irrelevant schism—over whether this year's Edsel should have fins.

The only filmmakers in Hollywood who can pretend they're above all this are the ones who've already made their wad. After helming the first *Terminator* and its lucrative 1991 sequel, *T2: Judgment Day*, James Cameron scorned the threepeat: "With the third *Terminator*, there were dollar signs on everything," he airily said. "The original sense of guerrilla filmmaking was gone." Come again? Famous as the most expensive movie filmed up to then (it cost more than $100 million), the turgid *T2* was already a travesty of *The Terminator*'s terse, B-movie pulp poetry. The third picture was only a redundancy, and relatively modest as grotesquerie goes. But in the meantime, Cameron had directed that ultimate sequel-unfriendly project (unless *The Passion of the Christ* counts, and I do worry that Mel Gibson believes otherwise) *Titanic*, which qualified as guerrilla filmmaking at about the level Stalin qualifies as a guerrilla—and which earned Cameron so much money that he could have launched his own steamship line.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. Critical examination of the New Testament Gospels reveals sloppy history, perhaps deliberately deceptive, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Most Christians seem not to notice or care---transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom historical accuracy matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides: 113 notes taken down by Thomas of perplexing things Jesus said. Such notes were probably made at the times they were heard and have not suffered alteration ---the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* and all Marcan context, and upon this develops a narrative about Jesus that is tenably historical.

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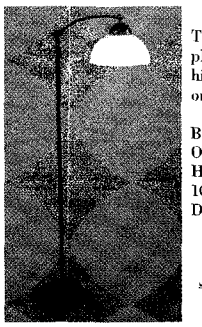

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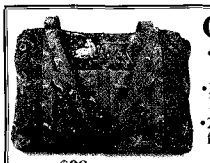

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Complicating things is the demand to hew to the tried-and-true that comes from franchise fans themselves, usually expressed as a devout wish that the latest reprise won't "ruin" their beloved touchstone. (Never mind that complaining about what George Lucas has done to *Star Wars* is now many *Star Wars* nutters' favorite hobby—which only demonstrates that some religions can outlast even Yahweh's fallibility.) This kind of pressure is nothing new: David O. Selznick bowed to *Gone With the Wind* readers' howls that only Clark Gable could play Rhett Butler, and stars from Mary Pickford to Humphrey Bogart—and let's not forget Jim Carrey and Adam Sandler—faced resistance when they essayed mold-breaking roles. The new wrinkle, as *Open Wide* reveals, is that today's hardcore franchise fans are not only self-conscious interest groups but, thanks to the Internet and the media-age paradox of institutionalized mass subcultures, impressively organized ones. According to *Clerks* director Kevin Smith, himself a mass-subculture poster boy, their stake in a property like *Terminator 3* amounts to "a sense of authorship"; their emotional investment not only trumps but is vital to the continuing health of the filmmakers' economic one.

"With the third *Terminator*, the original sense of guerrilla filmmaking was gone," James Cameron griped. Meanwhile, he'd directed *Titanic*—guerrilla filmmaking at about the level Stalin was a guerrilla.

As Smith says, the transformation of audiences into quasi-formalized constituencies never happens with movies like *The Human Stain*, which, for all their genteel but real merits, function as the educated version of escapism—elegant diversions that nobody is likely to get obsessed with. This just proves that, like it or not, the crud is where the vitality is. Almost a year before *T3*'s release its director, Jonathan Mostow, took care to make a pilgrimage to the giant comics trade show Comic-Con, where he solemnly swore to a crowd of dubious true believers that he was "making the movie that, as a fan of the franchise, I'd like to see as the third installment." The crowd went nuts only for the ultimate validation—Schwarzenegger in the flesh. The resemblance to Karl Rove's shoring up "the base" before peddling George W. Bush to mainstream voters is uncanny.

Indeed, one of *Open Wide*'s most fascinating if inexplicit themes is the degree to which pop culture now functions as politics by other means. In however innocuous a form, politics itself mostly alienates audiences; in most bizzers' opinion, the fatal mistake made by *LB2* was to pack the heroine off to Capitol Hill, a setting few *Legally Blonde* fans could identify with. In Hayes and Bing's account the first big "Uh-oh" for the sequel comes when one girl in a preteen focus group calls two-time Oscar winner Sally Field, playing a congresswoman, "the lady in the black"—as in "the lady in the black is really boring." Another girl asks an absolutely superb question about Elle Woods—"Why'd she go to Washington?"—and the fact that the filmmakers had apparently never asked themselves this doesn't say much for their savvy. But even as *LB2*'s makers are bumping up against the teen crowd's stony aversion to anything related to government, Schwarzenegger's budding gubernatorial candidacy—and isn't "gubernatorial" a word seemingly coined in the expectation that one day we'd get to hear Arnold say it?—is glamorizing politics as pure pop spectacle.

His entry into California's 2003 recall election isn't a development that Hayes and Bing could have foreseen, but it certainly doesn't hurt their story. As promoting *T3* merges with Schwarzenegger's first steps on the campaign trail, the real revelation is that the mirror works both ways. While it's not news that running for office resembles marketing a movie, you may marvel at how much the high-stakes game of promoting rival blockbusters also parodies

BEST SELLERS ABROAD

CHINA

Top ten works of nonfiction, as of January 2005, based on sales data compiled by the Beijing Open Book Market Consulting Center

1. No Excuse, *by Ferrar Cape.* Written in Chinese, purportedly by an American, this self-help guide urges adherence to what it calls West Point's most important motto: "Failure is not an option."

2. Detail Is Key to Success, *by Wang Zhongqiu.* This book's message is simple: those Chinese with lofty dreams should focus on the nitty-gritty first.

3. Distilling the Three Kingdoms, *by Cheng Junyi.* Business lessons drawn from battles fought in third-century China. If only corporate mergers had the dramatic appeal of civil war.

4. Tell Your Child: You're Great! *by Lu Qin.* Parenting advice for a nation struggling to raise legions of only children, often known as "little emperors."

5. Examining 12 Qing Emperors, *by Yan Chongnian.* A history of China's last imperial dynasty—the companion volume to a program on China Central Television.

6. Duty: A Complete Textbook of Professionalism and Integrity, *by Elbert Hubbard.* A collection of essays about virtue as a path to success, by a nineteenth-century American.

7. Sun Wukong Is a Good Employee, *by Cheng Junyi.* A new take on a classic Chinese fable, in which the free-spirited monk who brought Buddhism to China is cast in the role of a selfless team player.

8. No Excuse II, *by Ferrar Cape.* In the sequel to *No Excuse* (see above), failure is still not an option.

9. Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, *by Steven Covey.* A translation of the 1990 American classic. In a Chinese rush hour, developing Covey's second habit ("Begin with the end in mind") might prove difficult.

10. A Message to Garcia, *by Elbert Hubbard.* This account of a message delivered by President William McKinley to a Cuban dissident on the eve of war emphasized dedication and service in the face of insurmountable odds and extreme anguish. Soothing words for Chinese migrant laborers?

—SEAN CREEHAN

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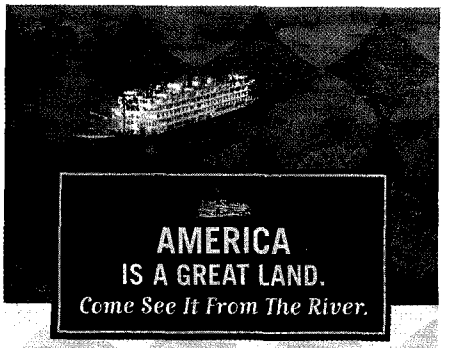

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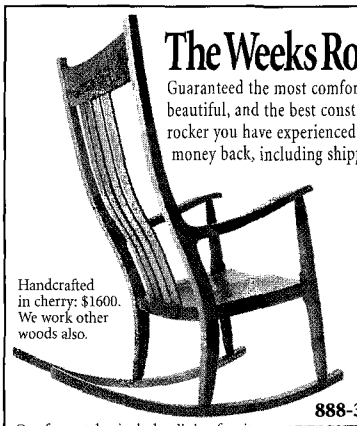

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an election, with the voters' verdict arriving in the form of the opening-weekend numbers, which studios now consider the whole ball game.

That's why for Arnold—the star as pure essence of Bugs—the transition from the top of one heap to the top of another was no transition at all. While Ronald Reagan was rightly derided for imbibing his values (and whole sense of reality) from Warner Bros.' vaults, at least they were, well, values. A pupil of the industry rather than the art form, Schwarzenegger has only one core value: winning—with all the contempt for losers that implies. One wonders what financially strapped voters watching last summer's Republican convention made of this multimillionaire and Kennedy in-law's cheery command not to be "economic girly-men"; but the truth is probably that they figured he knew what he was talking about.

Along with Arnold's preternatural confidence, the one constant of his unlikely rise has been his genius for PR. He was always among the few stars who relished promoting their movies more than they did appearing in them, and to a man who "at press junkets ... might do two hundred interviews in a weekend," as Hayes and Bing put it, "the idea of staying on message politically was as intuitive as a bench press." Although the authors, in one of their rare detectable outbreaks of fawning, soft-pedal his seamy side, characterizing the *Premiere* article that first publicized his loutish treatment of women as "a nasty takedown attempt" and leaving it at that, *Open Wide*'s glimpses of Schwarzenegger's relentless shrewdness are invaluable. Here he is in newly conquered Baghdad, unveiling *Terminator 3* to our presumably grateful soldiery: "It is really wild driving around here. I mean the poverty, and you see there is no money, it is disastrous financially and there is the leadership vacuum, *pretty much like in California right now.*" (Emphasis added; syntax unchanged. But Schwarzenegger's grammar is the sort of off-road vehicle that gets him exactly where he wants to go.)

More trite, but as depressing, is his earlier salute to the troops: "I play Terminator, but you guys are the real Terminators." Because Hayes and Bing aren't culture critics (both are *Variety* staffers), they don't discuss the gruesome shift in attitudes the *Terminator* series charts. The 1984 original was a great female-empowerment fable before the genre was familiar, all about average-gal Linda Hamilton's courage in battling her robotic nemesis. By *T3*, Hamilton had vanished and, in a perfect inversion of the first movie's values, the menacing cyborg Schwarzenegger initially played had been transformed into America's ideal protector. Adding insult to irony, Arnold was facing off against vixenish Kristanna Loken as Hillary Clinton—er, sorry, as the T-X, a female Terminator. It's also nice to learn from *Open Wide* that Schwarzenegger, no fool about how to thrill teenage boys, personally bankrolled the scene in which he smashes Loken's head into a toilet.

Nonetheless, it's typical of Schwarzenegger's acumen (and cynicism) that he blatantly treated *T3* as one last big score—the perfect enhancement of his brand recognition—before launching the political career he'd planned for years. The industry of which he's now an alumnus has no game plan of its own, and Hayes and Bing let the fundamental hysteria of Hollywood's blockbuster mentality speak for itself. Their larger point is that the conventional wisdom holds only until the unconventional kind inevitably demolishes it. *The Passion of the Christ* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*—two films destined to be forever linked—demonstrate the blinkered nature of the studios' obsession with comic-book franchises, "sure things" so costly and elaborate that they end up as reckless gambles despite themselves. Bizzers like to pretend that they've rationalized the process, but they haven't. They're just clutching at rabbits' feet.

Tom Carson is a contributing editor of The Atlantic *and the author of* Gilligan's Wake, *a novel.*

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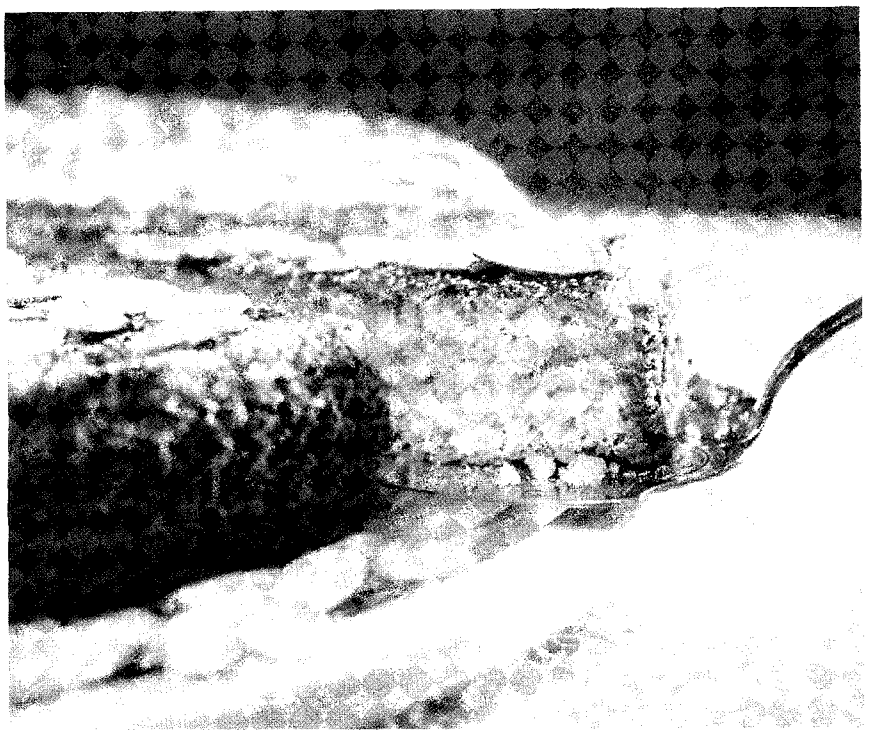

ELLEN CALLAWAY

FOOD

The Kosher Conversion

The market for kosher food is growing, for reasons both practical and spiritual

BY CORBY KUMMER

Passover is when Jewish eating habits seem the most distinct from those in the rest of the world—the most restrictive, the most inexplicable. Keeping Passover means adhering to rules and traditions on top of the standard rules of kashrut, or keeping kosher, which include not eating shellfish or pork and separating anything containing milk from anything containing meat. At Passover bread and all other leavened foods are banned, and the questions of what is and isn't allowed only start there. Corn or no corn? Rice or no rice? Must staples that don't need to be marked kosher the rest of the year—milk, for instance—be marked "kosher for Passover," along with the matzoh? (As with all questions Jewish, it depends on who's answering.)

And yet Passover is the time of year when sales of kosher foods reach their peak, and when the greatest number of Jews follow some form of dietary abstention. A moment of generally happy reconnection with Jewish identity, Passover can move usually unobservant Jews to consider keeping kosher year-round. With its many preparatory kitchen-cleaning requirements, it is also the most logical time to make the switch.

The market for foods certified kosher has been steadily increasing for at least a decade. Menachem Lubinsky, a marketing consultant and the editor of *Kosher Today*, a trade magazine, estimates that of $500 billion in retail grocery sales last year, $185 billion was certified kosher—a rise since 1988 of about 285 percent. As of 2004 fully 85,000 products were certified kosher, compared with 18,000 in 1988. Much food—flour, rice, and other staples, and all produce—is kosher by definition, and need not bear a "hechsher," or kosher symbol, although a lot of it does. A hechsher can be as much an indication that a manufacturer thinks certification will attract customers as that it produces kosher food.

Commercial kosher certification in this country has come a long way from its beginnings, in the early 1920s, when shoppers had to look hard to see if a product was officially kosher. The inconspicuousness was intentional. With increasing waves of immigrants requesting kosher foods, established (and non-Jewish) food manufacturers recognized a new market to be tapped. But they didn't want to lose any customers. So they asked the Orthodox Union, based in New York and today the largest certifying organization in the world (it certifies food in seventy-seven countries), to devise a symbol that did not show the word "kosher" or betray its meaning to those who might prefer to avoid "Jewish food." The symbol—a U inside an O—is still in use. Today's hechshers are practically blaring by comparison, and many mainstream producers now spell out the words "pareve," meaning neither dairy nor meat, and "kosher" itself.

The labeling is useful not only to those keeping kosher but also to many others who choose or need to control their diet. Vegetarians know that a product marked "dairy" or "pareve" contains no meat, and vegans and people who are lactose-intolerant know that pareve foods contain no dairy products. Seventh-Day Adventists, who are often vegetarian, are an important part of the kosher market, as are Muslims: all forms of pork are both haram (not allowed in the Muslim diet) and non-kosher, or treif (literally "unfit"). Observant Muslims will buy kosher meat in the absence of a halal butcher.

People are turning to kosher food not just because of a revival in religious observance but because anyone buying food today is rightly concerned with safety, especially the safety of meat, and kosher certification requires careful inspection. Animals that are visibly ill before slaughter are forbidden. (This would have eliminated the "downer" cow, unable to walk, that was the one confirmed carrier of mad cow disease in the United States; other safeguards include the prohibition of stunning before slaughter, which can

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spread brain and spinal fluids to meat.) Some animals are further examined after slaughter. "Glatt," a word meaning "smooth," signifies that the lungs of the animal have been found free of adhesions indicating possible cancer or other systemic disease. An animal rejected as glatt can be qualified as (plain) kosher, but many slaughterhouses simply sell that meat as non-kosher, so by default all their kosher meat is glatt. Although "glatt" has no meaning outside the slaughtering process, in the 1970s it became generally used to mean "extra kosher," as Lisë Stern explains in her recently published *How to Keep Kosher*.

Kosher certification does not, however, offer many of the guarantees that health- and environment-conscious consumers might want. Kosher food need not be organic. There is no clear rabbinical stance on genetically modified organisms, even if in theory the manifold rules against anomalous foods would seem to forbid them. This is a natural concern for "advocates of eco-kashrut," as Stern terms them in her book. (With kashrut being adopted by many young Jews, there is of course an eco-kashrut movement; you can read about it at earthkosher.com.)

And kosher food is often produced by multinational agribusinesses whose environmental and labor practices can be questionable. Hebrew National, for instance, known for its kosher hot dogs, is owned by ConAgra, a company practically synonymous with global agribusiness. (For reasons of slaughtering and certification methods, many Orthodox rabbis recommend against Hebrew National products.) Like all other industrially raised and packaged foods, kosher food can be full of trans fats (more unhealthful than butter, though pareve) and processed sugar. Lovers of "old" Coke take note: at Passover big-name sodas are made not with the usual corn syrup—cheap and insipid and, happily, not kosher for Passover—but with the far superior cane syrup.

Perhaps more surprising, certification rules seldom concern the conditions under which animals are raised, though the Torah does advocate the humane treatment of animals. Factory-farm veal, inhumane by almost anyone's standards, is officially kosher, although many rabbis recommend against consuming it or any other animal raised inhumanely. The Talmud does spell out the rules of slaughter. Shochets, trained slaughterers, must slit animals' throats cleanly and without hesitation, using a well-honed, nick-free blade. At the beginning of a slaughtering session the shochet blesses the process as commanded by God; the blessing is not for the animal or its life. Contrary to many people's belief, food certified kosher is not blessed by rabbis.

Apart from being assured of meat likelier to be safe, why bother buying kosher food, let alone keeping kosher? The answer for Jews is to obey God, pure and simple. As Judith Shulevitz, who is writing a book on the relevance of the sabbath in modern times, put it to me recently, keeping kosher is meant to "carve holiness out of the physical world." It is not meant to be justified by claims for food safety or superior ethics. Such justifications have been forwarded since at least the time of Maimonides, who wrote in the mid-1100s, while a court physician to the sultan of Egypt, that both Jews and Muslims prohibited pork because the pig's "habits and food" are "very filthy and loathsome." Finding logic in the rules of kashrut is a frustrating task, as the anthropologist Marvin Harris entertainingly recounts in his book *The Sacred Cow and the Abominable Pig*. Citing numerous examples of circular, anachronistic logic, Harris explains that attempts to apply modern knowledge of hygiene and disease and zoology to the Middle East of biblical times are usually fruitless. (Harris notes, for example, that the knowledge that undercooked pork may cause trichinosis dates only to 1859.)

In her seminal essay "The Abominations of Leviticus," from *Purity and Danger*, the anthropologist Mary Douglas discouraged theologians and anthropologists alike from using modern scientific thinking to justify bibli-

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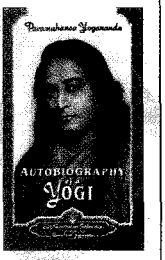

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cal prohibitions. Douglas posited that what underlay the rules of kashrut was the desire to establish and maintain order (or "seder"). Kashrut was meant not to safeguard the health of Jews but to bring them closer to holiness, by keeping them separate from other tribes and religions.

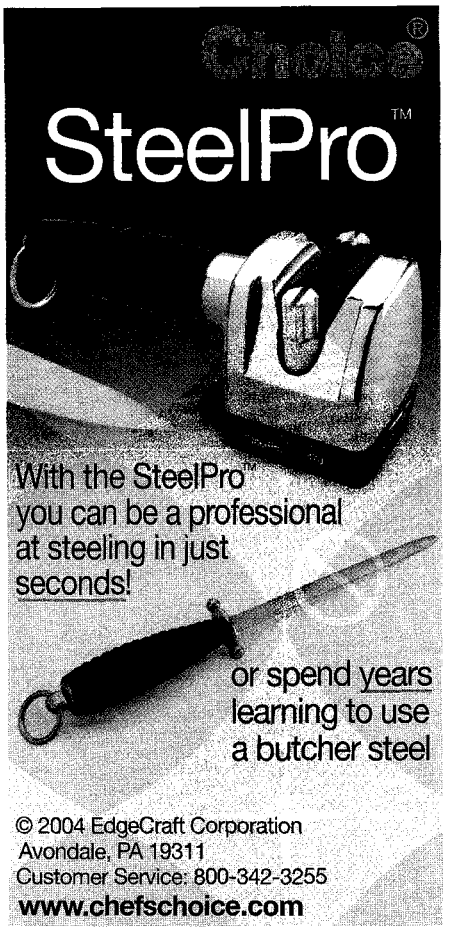
The very root of the word "holiness," Douglas pointed out, means "set apart." She concluded,

> The dietary laws [were] like signs which at every turn inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God. By rules of avoidance, holiness was given a physical expression in every encounter with the animal kingdom and at every meal.

Keeping kosher is at heart a spiritual choice, then, and separation and the inexplicable are its essence. The practical consequences of that choice provide daily challenges, and daily connections to the spiritual.

The biggest challenge is the first: converting a kitchen. Stern gives friendly and practical instructions in her book, along with the advice that if you're thinking of making the switch, Passover is a good time to do it. Observant Jews must clean their kitchens top to bottom anyway, to excise all traces of chametz, or bread and leavened foods. Most American Jews, following the advice of U.S. rabbinical organizations, also use separate Passover dishes, like the ones my family hauled up from the basement before the first seder. These two new sets of dishes, one for milk and one for meat, are in addition to the two sets of dishes used the rest of the year. Jews in other countries simply kasher—or "make kosher"—their everyday dishes for the holiday, usually by immersing them in boiling water (Stern quotes an Israeli friend who asked, "Who had four sets of dishes?").

The annual ritual of cleansing and separation is a smaller-scale version of a changeover to kosher, a more-stringent procedure that requires days of pantry purging and thorough cleaning of cabinets and drawers; you must also boil metal cookware and



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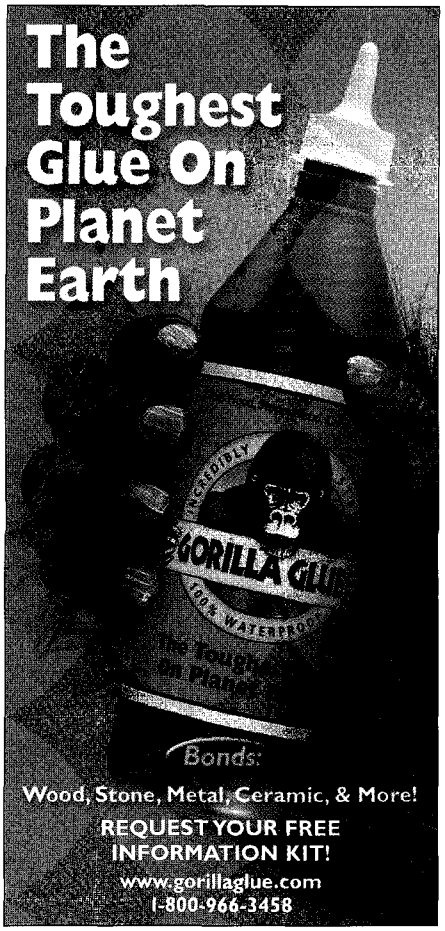

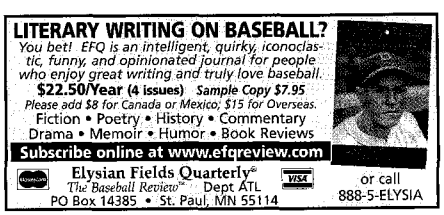

make sure you have two of everything (wooden spoons, knives, broiling pans). Labeling cabinets and drawers is helpful, and so is color coding, a tradition familiar from the red (meat) and blue (milk) dish towels and soap pads of my childhood. Stern traces the widespread use of color coding to the soap manufacturer Israel Rokeach, who developed a kosher soap (made without animal fat) in his native Poland and produced blue and red versions of it in 1890s New York.

Not everything in a non-kosher kitchen can be converted. Most toaster ovens, for instance, cannot survive the scorching heat necessary to kasher them, as stoves and regular ovens can; buy a new one. With this requirement as with all others, Stern is careful to say, Consult a rabbi. There is no single authority and no one rule.

Stern leavens (if I may) the book with reminiscences of her childhood, when, as a displeased nine-year-old who liked bacon, she was made to participate in her parents' decision to go kosher, as part of an attempt to add meaning to their lives. I already knew Stern to be an expert baker; we met when she worked at this magazine, and we later collaborated on baking and candy recipes for a book I wrote on coffee. She's also an active member, with her husband and three children, of a Cambridge synagogue. Her account of how her initial resentment turned to acceptance and then to enthusiasm may mirror what others newly converted to kashrut feel.

Daily challenges become second nature; daily deprivations are surprisingly few. And habits become ingrained. My sister does not keep kosher—nor do I—but she recently told me that it would never occur to her to mix milk or butter with meat in her kitchen, and the only time I countenance it in mine is for the ultra-treif pork simmered in milk. My stepmother, who did not grow up in a Jewish home, chose to keep kosher when she married my father, and says that after twenty years the one rule of kashrut she still resents is not mixing milk and meat dishes in a single dishwasher load, which she finds both illogical and wasteful.

She enjoys experimenting with recipes in the Jewish cookbooks I've sent her over the years. The reigning queens of the genre, Joan Nathan, Claudia Roden, and Faye Levy, have written numerous books demonstrating the sometimes astonishing international scope of Jewish food, most but not all of it kosher. Judy Zeidler, a sophisticated cook and traveler, has written many books of up-to-date recipes that happen to be kosher (*The Gourmet Jewish Cook*, *The 30-Minute Kosher Cook*), taking the only sensible approach: her recipes are wide-ranging and good, and don't call for fake versions of ingredients like cream, butter, and bacon, which are almost always unsatisfactory and awful-tasting. Maggie Glezer, the author of the comprehensive *Artisan Baking Across America*, recently published *A Blessing of Bread*, with two dozen recipes for challah, and instructions for making matzoh—though you'd have to be very flexible in personal observance to call it kosher for Passover.

My favorite book on Jewish cooking, frequently in and out of print since its 1981 release, miraculously appeared in the mail while I was researching this article, in a fresh reprint with a slightly revised title: *Classic Italian Jewish Cooking*. The author, Edda Servi Machlin, grew up in Pitigliano, a small hill town in southern Tuscany, where her father was the rabbi and shochet. This is a great cookbook, on a par with Marcella Hazan's books in clarity and in promoting a wide understanding of and reverence for Italian food. It has inspired many of my travels throughout Italy, and I once made a pilgrimage to Pitigliano, which she lovingly evokes as a pre-war model of comity between Jew and gentile.

Machlin includes numerous Passover recipes, including chicken soup with peas and homemade egg noodles made with Passover flour, and a showpiece dish of lamb chops with chicken meatballs and spinach (the San Francisco author Joyce Goldstein fruitfully mined similar territory in *Saffron Shores: Jewish Cooking of the Southern*

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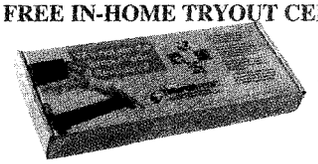

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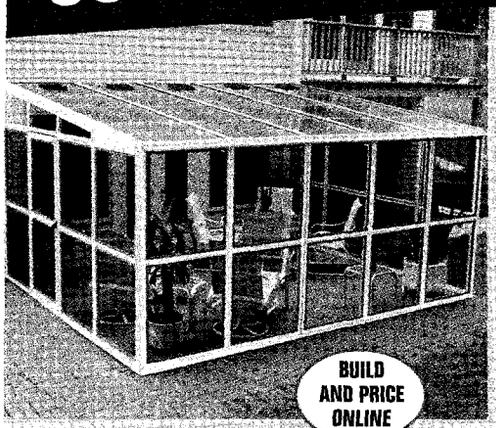

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"Running the Gamut"

Across. 1. HOS + TESS 7. G(RAMP)A 12. ENTRANCE (double def.) 13. OR(A + L)S 14. M(AGENT)A 16. MO(TO)WN 17. SUB + LIME 18. S(N)EE RED 20. A + G(E)OLD 23. E + MOTE 25. R + ADIOS 27. CAR(O) + USE 31. REFRAIN (double def.) 32. CONNI(V)E 34. TO + PIC 35. S(ED)UM 36. DERRIERE (*dairy air* homophone) 37. TR(OPH)Y (*hop* anag.) 38. REV + ERE + D *Down.* 1. HE(L)M 2. ON(I) + ON 3. STATE (double def.) 4. TROLL + EYED 5. SNAKE (hidden) 6. S + CREED 7. GE + TSET (rev.) 8. ARGU(E)S 9. MAR + IN + A 10. PLUM + BING 11. AS + PERSE 15. AUGER (homophone) 18. SAWDUST (anag.) 19. REMIT (rev.) 21. R(AN)AFTER 22. LAREDO (anag.) 24. MO(N)ODY 25. ROOK + IE 26. P(A + Y)UP 27. CAPER (double def.) 28. A(FIR)E 29. UNDER (hidden) 30. S(N)ORE 33. TOLLED (homophone)

Mediterranean). But the annual conundrum that sends Passover cooks to bookstores is dessert, and Machlin supplied the cake that has become my family's favorite at seders—torta del re, or king's cake, an elegant almond torte that is fresh-tasting from lemon peel. It inspires that most desired end-of-seder-meal exclamation: "This doesn't taste like Passover!"

For a cake that will yield twelve thin slices, line the bottom of a ten-inch springform pan with parchment or wax paper, grease it, and coat it with matzoh meal (or bread crumbs outside Passover). Preheat the oven to 325° with a rack placed in the middle. Beat five egg whites with a pinch of salt until they are stiff, and set them aside. In a large bowl beat at medium speed five egg yolks, adding one and a quarter cups of sugar in a slow stream, until the yolks are lemon-colored, three to five minutes. Gradually fold in two and a half cups (ten ounces) of blanched almonds, chopped very fine but not ground, along with the grated rind of one lemon, a teaspoon of vanilla extract, and, if desired, a teaspoon of almond extract. The nuts will gum up the airy yolk mixture, but persevere; stir to make a coarse, hard paste. Work in a third of the beaten whites to lighten the paste, and then fold in the remaining whites as delicately as possible. Pour the batter evenly into the prepared pan and place in the center of the rack. Bake for one hour without opening the oven door. Then turn off the heat and leave the cake in the oven, with the door ajar, for ten to fifteen minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and invert it onto a cooling rack. When the cake is thoroughly cool (wait at least thirty minutes), release it upside down onto a serving plate. Sift confectioner's sugar (be sure it's kosher for Passover, meaning made with potato rather than corn starch) on top, and decorate with toasted sliced almonds if you like. The root of holiness may be separation, but this is a cake that can unite the most kosher-skeptical of cooks.

Corby Kummer, a senior editor of The Atlantic, *is the author of* The Pleasures of Slow Food *and* The Joy of Coffee.

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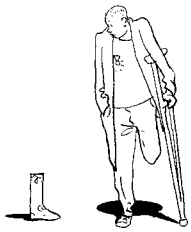


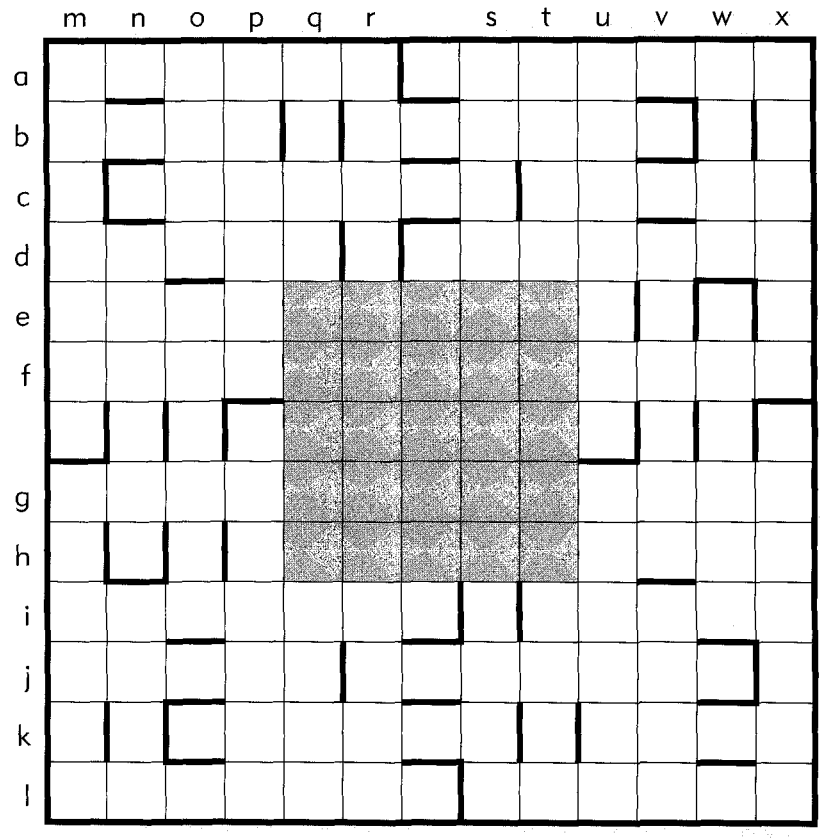
THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX *and* HENRY RATHVON

Sightseeing

An oft-viewed sight is on display in this puzzle's shaded central word square, in which the five-letter Acrosses are the same as the five-letter Downs. Four clue answers gain partial entry into the shaded square, supplying a few of its letters; otherwise, the border of the inner square is not crossed. Four unclued entries provide clues for words in the square; each appears directly before, after, above, or below its matching word. The central word in the square identifies the sight to be viewed; its locale, though perhaps obvious, is suggested by four more unclued entries. When two answers share a row or column, their clues are given in proper order; when an answer shares a row or column with an unclued entry, either may come first. Five clue answers are capitalized.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 138.



ACROSS

a. King embracing King in patch together
Space between seats for the French wedding party

b. Dandy place twice audited
Struck down old soldier with abridged dictionary?

c. Furious at all, including Greek

d. World capital is behind average
Hit around front of lip, fought

e. Right on a lavatory door sign

f. Horseshoe involved in a test for screen cowboy

g. Mother and boyfriend listened to Latin dance music

h. Applications going through house sitter

i. Element corrupted in soil containing carbon
Feel disappointed about missing the first bird

j. Pink piece of ribbon found in glowing chunk

k. Goggled, distinguished editor
Case for keeping needles in perpetuity

l. Fight put Washington in risk (*two words*)
Stitched hems in pair of trousers and spread

DOWN

m. Leave behind 151 computer graphics (*two words*)

n. A Soviet fighter playing with Spanish girlfriends
Interest that hurts a state

o. Obscure writing on a book jacket, for the most part
Paint moniker inside train on a raised track

p. Pester about wrong means of integration
Preclude shifting above it

q. South involved in the Mexican defeat

r. Broadcast, i.e., a TV show
Love Boat brought back some pods

s. Laboratory burner and part of a pot returned
Demands massages for the audience

t. Release newsweekly tending to the left

u. Let MD specialist into landslide (*two words*)
Rub gel all over musician

v. Coloring illuminated Greek letters
Attended proper service

w. Cruel brute is so backward
Leer at bum in Irish town

x. Withhold a blue dye

Note: *The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.*

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WORD FUGITIVES

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

Last December a reader asked, "What's the word for that restless feeling that causes me to repeatedly peer into the refrigerator when I'm bored?" Robert Clark, of Austin, Texas, knows that feeling. He responded, "I often find myself revisiting the same refrigerator I left in disappointment only moments ago, as if this time the perfect snack—which I somehow managed to overlook before—will be there waiting for me. Almost invariably I find that I am suffering from a *leftoveractive imagination*."

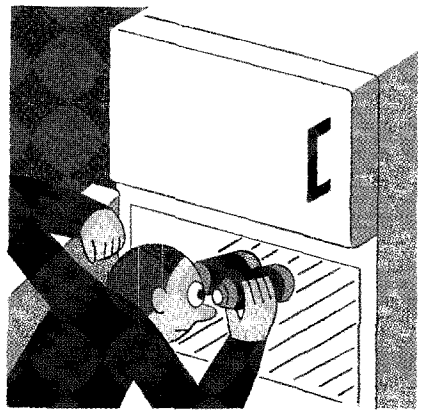
Cold comfort, refrigerator magnetism, smorgasboredom, and *freonnui* were all popular suggestions. Jon Craig, of Del Rey Oaks, California, proposed *stirvation,* and Jared Paventi, of Liverpool, New York, *procrastifrigeration.* According to Dick Bruno, of Hackensack, New Jersey, a person in the relevant frame of mind is *bored chilly.* And Chris Rooney, of San Francisco, wrote, "Back in my bachelor days, when I wasn't going out with someone that night I'd head to the fridge for some *expiration dating*."

Then there were the brand-specific coinages, such as "the urge to *play tag with the Maytag*," from Marcel Couturier, of Nashua, New Hampshire; *Frigistaire,* from Bob Segal, of Chicago, among others; and the upscale *Sub-Zero interest,* from Daniel Markovitz, of New York City.

But these are getting much too fancy, don't you think? Top honors go to Allan Crossman, of Oakland, California, who was the first of many readers to propose the neat, uncomplicated coinage *fridgety.*

The other December fugitive sought was "a term that describes the manner in which two people who dislike each other manage to avoid acknowledgment ... when their paths cross in public." Troy Bramston, of Sydney, Australia, wrote, "This is what is known as giving each other the *cold shoulder*." True—but what fun is that? Doug Donderi, of Toronto, Ontario, wrote, "The best word I know for this is *select-a-vision.* I do not take credit for this. I don't know how this word came to me—but it does the job, and I have always used it in my self-to-self vocabulary." In fact Donderi has engaged in some ingenious recycling. *SelectaVision* is the name of a videodisc system that RCA introduced almost a quarter of a century ago. The discs looked like silvery LPs, and contained video as well as audio.

Chris Lazzarino, of Lawrence, Kansas, apparently had no trouble getting into the spirit of this question. He



wrote, "Ah, the delight in seeing and not acknowledging your spiteful, black-hearted little enemy! Few dark pleasures are more satisfying than dishing out the *silent greetment*." Lisa Crocker, of Springfield, Illinois, had a suggestion that, she admitted, "is more like a non-greeting." Her word is *hellno.*

Katie Fife, of Dallas, coined *circumnavihate*; Jerry Schoen, of New Salem, Massachusetts, *n'approchement*; Pamela Halverson, of Raleigh, North Carolina, *snide-stepping*; and Pat Geoghegan, of Montreal, Quebec, *unanimosity.* Pamela Stewart, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote, "Two people avoiding each other in a social situation? Each is, to the other, a *persona non greeta*."

David Hochman, of Santa Monica, California, coined *near-dis,* and Nancy Lewkowicz, of Yellow Springs, Ohio, *sneer miss.* Stephen Zender, of Hudson, Wisconsin, coined *proxenmity,* and James H. Ballard, of West Lebanon, New Hampshire, *close poxenmity,* and Clela Reed, of Athens, Georgia, suggested *snubterfuge,* and P. Pagan, of Santa Barbara, California, *snubbing their foes.*

What an embarrassment of riches! But maybe the cleverest correspondent on this subject—at any rate, she who takes top honors—is Karen Sparapani, of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, who suggested *can't-standoffish.*

Now DEBORAH RO, of Seattle, writes, "What is the word to describe the moment right before you are about to do something terribly stupid, when everything runs in slow motion as you watch hopelessly? The actions I mean include locking your keys in the car, knocking over a beverage at dinner, or inserting a stack of bills into the mailbox—along with the checks you had intended to take to the bank for deposit."

And ROGER WILSON, of Roanoke, Virginia, writes, "Thin women: *petite, athletic, slender.* Larger women: *buxom, full-figured, Rubenesque.* Women in between? *Medium.* Not even dress shops have a flattering word for women who are just right. Please help me before I seek such a woman in a personal ad."

Send words that meet Deborah Ro's or Roger Wilson's needs to Word Fugitives, The Atlantic Monthly, *77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or visit the Word Fugitives page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by May 31. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like* The Atlantic*'s help in finding. Letters become the property of Word Fugitives and may be edited.*

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, a selection of recent autographed books by Atlantic *authors. The next installment's correspondents will be sent* Road Work, *by Mark Bowden;* Privilege, *by Ross Douthat; and* Angry Wind, *by Jeffrey Tayler.*

GREG CLARKE

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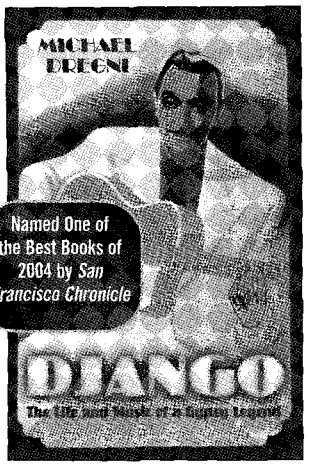

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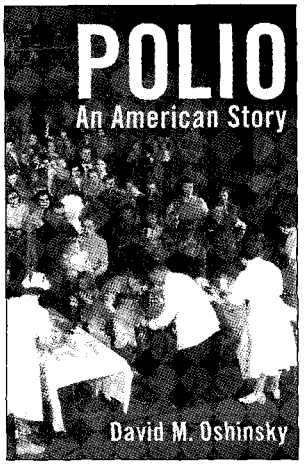

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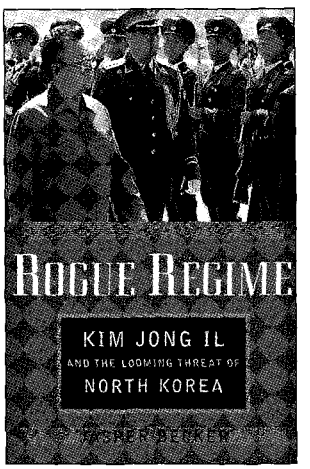

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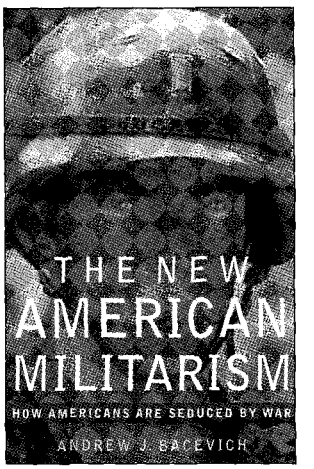

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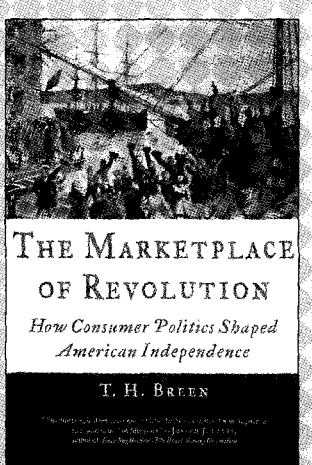

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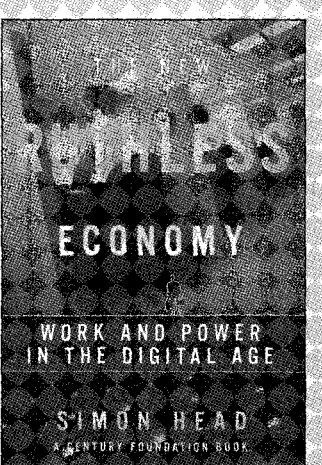

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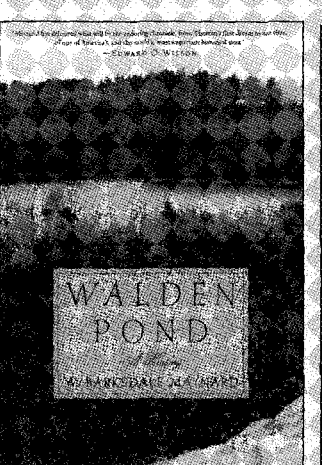

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POST MORTEM

The Marrying Kind

Owen Allred (1914–2005)

BY MARK STEYN

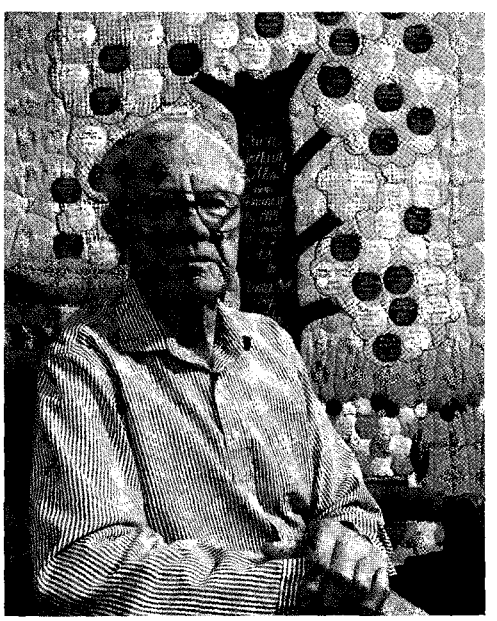
"I hate to be hated. I think everybody does. I want to be part, but I want to be myself and live the way I believe, the way the Lord told me to do.

"Now, does that make me an evil person?"

Well, it depends who's talking. A nice middle-aged gay man in a committed relationship, with a weekend home in Connecticut, where he serves as a popular longtime usher at the local "open and affirming" Congregational Church? Alas, no. Owen Allred was a proponent of a far less fashionable minority marriage cause: he was the patriarch of the Apostolic United Brethren, Utah's second largest polygamous group, a church with some 5,000 to 7,000 believers, many of them living a confetti throw from Allred's home in Bluffdale, on the edge of Salt Lake City. Seven thousand doesn't sound like a lot, but there are more polygamists in Owen Allred's municipality than gay Vermonters who've applied to their town clerk for a "civil union" permit.

I say "home," though *The New York Times* preferred "compound." The precise point at which a "ranch," a "bungalow," or an "eighteenth-century saltbox with many original features" becomes a "compound" is best left to real-estate agents ("Extensively remodeled compound with drop-dead views of ATF agents at the tree line calling for backup"). But the *Times* seems to use the term as universally accepted shorthand for "wacky cult"; and certainly Owen Allred attracted his share of lurid headlines over the decades. He came from a long line of Mormons—his great-grandfather walked with Brigham Young on the original trek to the Great Salt Lake—but Owen knew how to move with the times. He was the kind of stern fundamentalist patriarch who, when his church needed financing to buy the recreational hangout of the old Vegas mob, was savvy enough to route the deal through Belize. Two years ago a judge ruled that he'd laundered thousands of dollars and his church had swindled $1.5 million out of Marsha Jones, a onetime South American movie star and Detroit hood's moll who had changed her name to Virginia Hill in honor of Bugsy Siegel's squeeze. Poor old "Virginia" could handle the mobsters but got taken to the cleaners by the Mormons.

As the presiding elder and the only "living prophet" of his church, Allred was said by some to have learned the sacred Mormon rites directly from God. Others said he got them from a fellow named Fred Collier, who had a geneal-



ogist pal with access to the archives of the Latter-Day Saints. Collier's wife, Bonnie, pulled a Sandy Berger and smuggled microfilm of the holiest texts out in her bra and then passed it on to Allred. A third version, by the disenchanted polygamist and Nixon-era Secret Service agent Rod Williams, holds that he, Williams, stole the LDS holy ordinances for Allred. The living prophet conceded that Williams had brought them over to the house, but he told him to take them right back.

Owen came to the role of living prophet late in life, having been designated as such only after the Brethren's previous leader, his brother Rulon, was murdered, in 1977, when rival polygamists from the Church of the Lamb of God went on a killing spree after their leader, Ervil LeBaron, had been excommunicated by his older brother, the leader of another polygamous sect, the Church of the First Born of the Fullness of Time. There are men who cope with the stresses and tensions of multiple marriages but apparently go bananas at the thought of multiple polygamous sects. Ervil had his teenage bride Rena pump seven bullets into Rulon at point-blank range, mainly because another brother had gone into hiding and he thought that Rulon's funeral would flush him out and he could kill him there.

Yet the mob moll/Belize bank/homicidal child bride/sects 'n' violence segments of *Eyewitness News* do an injustice to Mr. Allred. For a presiding elder living in a compound, he was droll, urbane, and politically shrewd; Mormon polygamist-wise, this was not your father's patriarch. An open and engaging chap, he was especially open about all the engaging: he held press conferences and testified before legislatures on multiple marrying. He was very adroit at reminding his fellow Utahans that regardless of how many practicing polygamists there were in the state, those who were part of a broader polygamous inheritance were far more numerous, and included Senator Orrin Hatch and Mike Leavitt (then Utah's governor and now President Bush's secretary of health and human services)—men whose family histories are little different from the Allreds'. Born in Idaho, the son of the speaker of the state's House of Representatives, Owen Allred was excommunicated from the Latter-Day Saints in 1942, when he took his second walk down the aisle. By the end he'd married eight wives, fathered twenty-three children, raised another twenty-five stepchildren, and had more than 200 grandchildren.

In an age that deplores unreconstructed homophobes who are foolish enough to conflate gayness and pedo-

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philia, we're happy to assume that if some hatchet-faced patriarch with nothing but a compound in one of the less chic ZIP codes can find eight women prepared to marry him, they must be fourteen-year-old cousins he keeps in the cupboard under the stairs most of the week. But there's less verified child abuse among all the Utah churches than among priests who passed through Cardinal Law's diocese in Boston. It was the state that permitted marriage at fourteen, and Owen Allred who campaigned for the legislature to raise the age to sixteen. "For fifty years now," he said, "the rule among our people has definitely been that girls should not even start courting until they are at least seventeen."

At eighty-eight he told *The New York Times*, "People have the wrong idea that we're old-time kooks who prey on young girls. I suppose I'm guilty of that. My youngest wife is sixty-four. My oldest girl is ninety-three." He and his wives lived in four houses, lined up side by side, and all eight marriages were till death did them part. At Owen Allred's funeral six of his sons carried his coffin and as many daughters celebrated his memory with a rendition of "Oh, My Papa." And given that most of them aren't exactly spring chickens, I doubt that's because he was keeping them chained out in the dog run.

He died on Valentine's Day. And before you add "Which must have saved him a fortune at the florist" or "He collapsed under the weight of all the heart-shaped chocolate boxes he was carrying," Mark Woods, *The Florida Times-Union*'s sports columnist, did most of the polygamous Valentine gags three years ago, when he found himself in Salt Lake City for the Olympics and in need of a Utah-themed romantic column. So he called up Owen Allred.

> He wouldn't come to the phone. The man who answered said that Allred's not doing any interviews these days. And that he was busy.
>
> I bet.
>
> Eight wives. Do you buy valentine gifts in bulk? ("Yes, the same message, just change the name to Sally.")

Etc. To feminists, the practice of polygamy is inherently abusive. But to guys, it's mostly an easy laugh—the Old Testament elder who hit the swingers' jackpot. Journalists turned to him when they needed a quotation for a light item on a Utah brewery's introduction of Polygamy Porter (slogan: "Why have just one?"). Mr. Allred was not minded to order a crate for his next wedding toast: "We do not believe in alcoholic drinks of any kind," he said.

Utah is said to have a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy on polygamy, the conventional wisdom being that the likes of Allred are left alone out of official sympathy. That may have been true once, but I doubt it's the reason now. I was told recently that provincial officials in British Columbia have decided to let be their own polygamous community of Bountiful, because of a general feeling that if they hauled everyone before a judge, by the time the case wound up at the Supreme Court of Canada, all the defense lawyers would have to do is read out the justices' recent ruling giving the go-ahead to gay marriage. Whatever the merits of gay nuptials, it's hard to see why, if gender is irrelevant, the central immutable feature of marriage should now be the number of participants.

Gay activists get all huffy about being compared to some stump-toothed backwoods wives-beater. And as an argument against polygamy, mere indignation might suffice if it were just a matter of Owen Allred and his ilk. But last summer *Le Monde* leaked a government report revealing that polygamy was routinely practiced in Muslim ghettos in France. An informal survey of the Islamic communities of Ontario found much the same. In Britain the Inland Revenue is considering recognizing polygamy for the purposes of inheritance law, so that a Muslim husband's estate can be divided tax-free among several wives. And if it's a Muslim who finally makes it to an American state supreme court with a polygamy case, bet on the traditional deference to "multiculturalism."

Unlike the overtaxed Islamists of the United Kingdom, Owen Allred did not believe in legalizing polygamy. He fretted that it would then be practiced more carelessly—as legal, monogamous marriage is—and its holiness would be diminished. His detractors said he'd figured out that, like bootleg hooch, it's more profitable outside the law. As things stood, Allred claimed sole authority to bless polygamous unions, and you had to agree to tithe your income to him before he'd give you the nod.

"It takes twice as good a man to have two wives as it does to have one," Allred liked to say. On another Valentine's Day, in 2001, he took more than a hundred polygamists to the state legislature for the biggest public hearing on the subject in Utah's history. "The man who wants several women to be his sexual partners," Allred said, "can have children by them, and the state will support those children. He remains free of any legal accusation—until he marries more than one wife. Marry them, and he becomes a criminal."

Owen Allred was born in 1914, barely a generation after the LDS abandoned Joseph Smith's injunction to go forth and multiply multiply. For the best part of a century Allred kept it going, ensuring polygamy's survival into an era of hitherto unknown "rights to privacy" and modish "tolerance" and "multiculturalism." Demographic reality suggests that the new face of plural marriage in North America will not be that of Owen Allred or his kind. Still, he might take some comfort in knowing that his sacred covenant and/or lifestyle choice is almost certain to endure and prosper in the years ahead. A

Mark Steyn is a columnist for Britain's Telegraph Group, the Chicago Sun-Times, *and other publications.*

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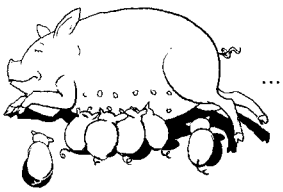

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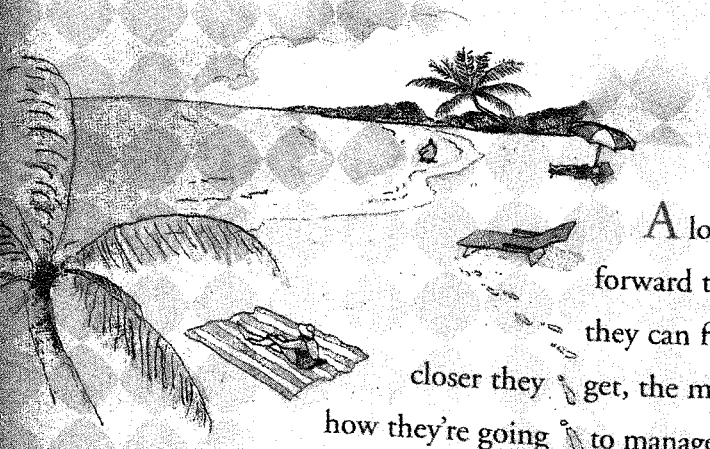

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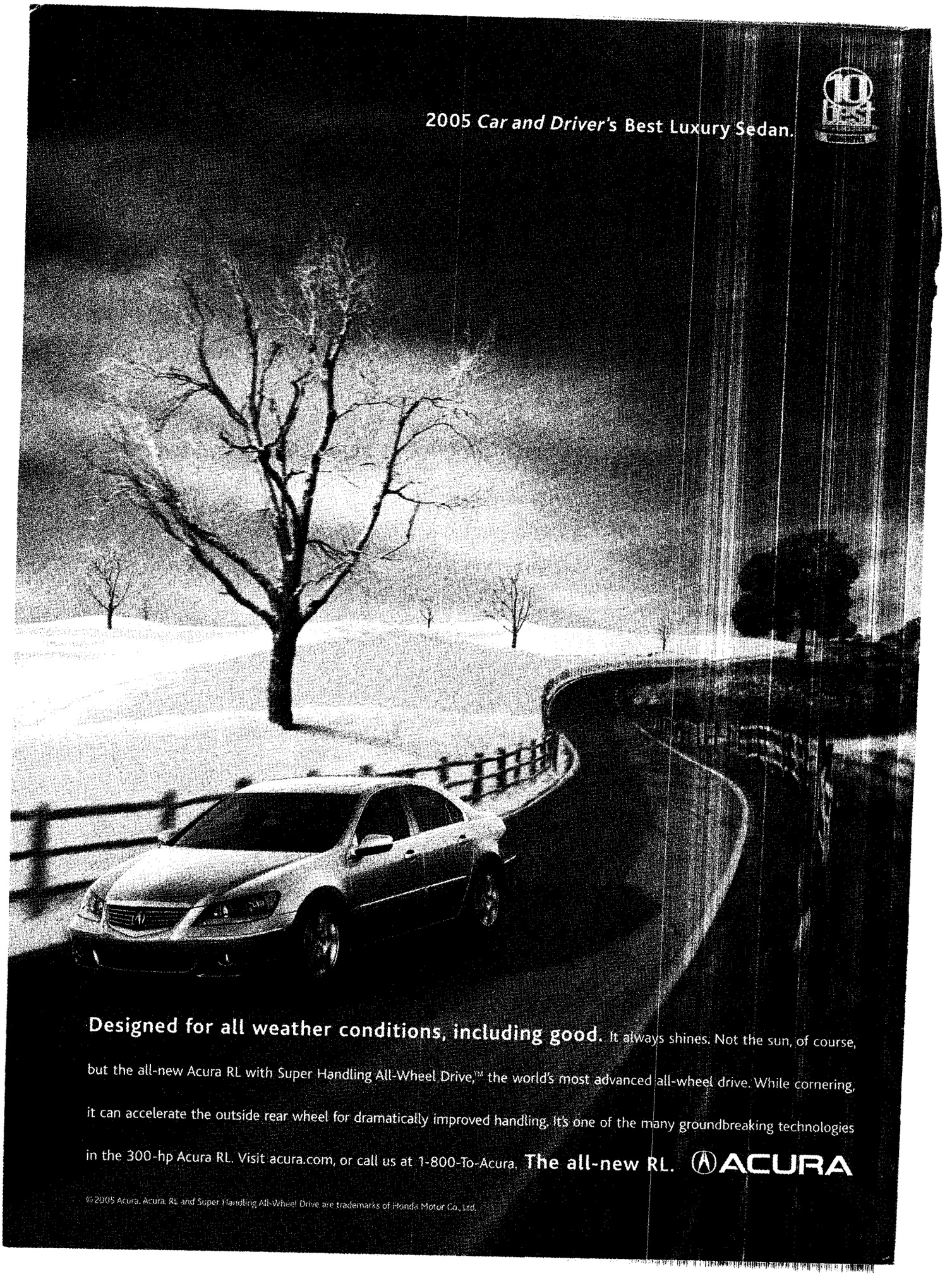

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